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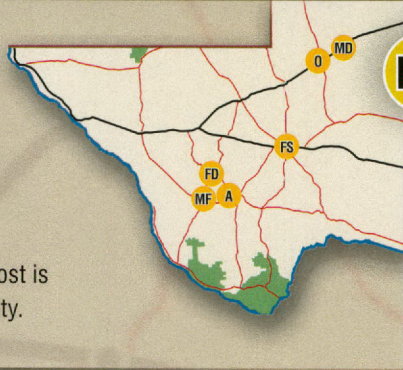
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EDITOR'S
NOTE



McDonald Observatory, located 16 miles from Fort Davis in Jeff Davis County, is open to the public Tuesday through Saturday from noon–5 p.m.

Rooms With a View

When describing life on “the Mountain” at McDonald Observatory, employees of the West Texas astronomical research facility aren’t afraid to gush. “It sounds cheesy, but we often greet each other with, ‘Another day in paradise,’” says Katie Kizziar, the assistant director for education and outreach. “A lot of people use that phrase, but we actually mean it.” The 64 astronomers, scientists, and support staff who live on-site make up a self-sustaining community, complete with its own volunteer fire department and water and sewage treatment facility.

On April 29–30, residents of the Mountain will welcome the public to McDonald Observatory’s first Dark Skies Festival. “It’s a chance for us to try to engage our neighboring communities to come have fun, see what it is we do out here, and learn more about preserving our night sky,” Kizziar says. Set in the Davis Mountains, the observatory is currently working with Jeff Davis County and surrounding counties to become a certified dark sky reserve through the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA). A coalition of local government entities, schools, libraries, and community groups are working together on light ordinances and educational campaigns to protect the celestial resource of

darkness. “Not only are dark skies integral to our research, but they’re an important resource everyone can enjoy,” Kizziar says. “My favorite thing about our events is hearing people *ooh* and *ahh* over the number of stars they can see.”

Since we first covered dark sky initiatives in Texas for our December 2019 cover story, Fredericksburg has joined other Central Texas towns, including Dripping Springs, Wimberley, Woodcreek, and Horseshoe Bay, as IDA-certified dark sky communities. For citizens interested in talking with their communities about joining the cause, Kizziar recommends they find like-minded people and take advantage of resources on the observatory and IDA websites. “Whether it’s amateur astronomers or master naturalists concerned about protecting habitats, there are any number of angles to find people who are interested in keeping our skies dark and quiet,” she says. After all, she continues, “Nobody hates stars.”

EMILY ROBERTS STONE
EDITOR IN CHIEF



Sandbar shark

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Milla - Ocelot



APRIL

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What Lies Beneath

Follow our photographers down dimly lit passageways into Texas' pristine caverns, some of the last unexplored places on Earth.

By Melissa Gaskill

*Photographs by Laurence Parent
and Erich Schlegel*

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An Elevated Outlook

A stay at the McDonald Observatory's Astronomers Lodge offers a behind-the-scenes look at life on "the Mountain."

By Joe Nick Patoski

Photographs by Christ Chávez

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United We Walk

Volkssport, the German practice of active leisure with friends, challenges the notion that sports need be competitive.

By Katie Gutierrez

Photographs by Melanie Grizzel



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Dine



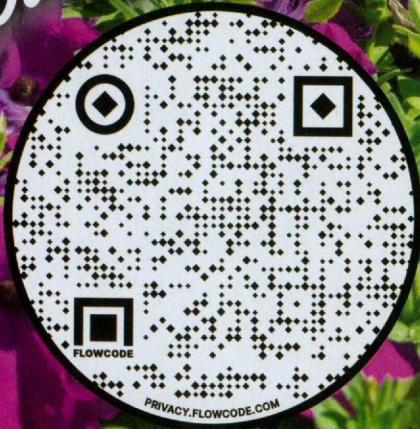
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Stay



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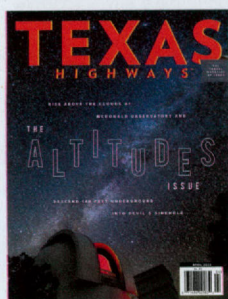
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The Pecos High Bridge in Southwest Texas



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ON THE COVER

Photograph by Clark Crenshaw

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Behind the Story



Dangling 140 feet from the mouth of Devil's Sinkhole in Rocksprings, Austin-based photographer Erich Schlegel felt the strap on his brand new camera break loose. "It happened in a millisecond," Schlegel says of the moment he instinctively caught it. Once he'd successfully rappelled down to the sinkhole floor, a team of cavers helped him capture images for "What Lies Beneath" (Page 38). Other than the close call, "the lighting was definitely the biggest challenge," he says. "The actual going in and out was one of the easiest parts." In addition to spelunking for *Texas Highways*, Schlegel shoots for a variety of clients, from the Austin Opera to *USA Today*, where he covers giant slalom skiing. Though he normally works alone, he credits the professional cavers (pictured above) who helped him into the sinkhole with obtaining the best possible shots. "It's the best feeling in the world coming out of that cave in one piece," he says.

We're Hiring!

Senior Editor

Texas Highways is looking for an experienced journalist to join our team as a Senior Editor to lead reader-service packages and food and dining coverage. Ideal candidates are passionate about magazine journalism and all things Texas—the state's culture, food, history, and, of course, travel destinations. Bilingual Spanish-speaking candidates are preferred, as are candidates with five years of experience in writing, editing, journalism, or communications. The starting salary for this position is \$70,000-\$74,000, depending on experience, and a bachelor's degree in a related field is required.

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We're hiring four summer interns to assist with editorial functions at our Austin office. Our interns write stories, fact-check articles for publication, and learn the ins and outs of magazine production. These full-time positions, which pay \$16.25-\$19.00 hourly, are open to college juniors, seniors, recent graduates, and graduate students.

For more information on either opening, visit texashighways.com/jobs.

Photo: Erich Schlegel (top)

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John Nova Lomax, Joe Nick Patoski, ire'ne lara silva

Contributing Editors
Heather Brand, Melissa Gaskill, E. Dan Klepper, June Naylor

Contributing Writers
Jac Darsnek, Chet Garner, Russell Graves, Katie Gutierrez, Anthony Head, Steven Craig Lindsey, Andrea Luttrell, Laurel Miller, Ellen Sweets

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Product and Engagement Manager
Natalie Moore

Digital Strategies Manager
Tyson Bird

Web Editor
Sarah Thurmond

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For all customer service needs, call 800-839-4997 (903-636-1123 outside the U.S.), or email customer_service@texashighways.us.
Subscriptions are \$24.95 annually (\$39.95 foreign).
For letters to the editor, write to letters@texashighways.com or Texas Highways, P.O. Box 141009, Austin, TX 78714-1009

PUBLISHER
Andrea Lin

ART
Creative Director
Mark Mahorsky

Art Director
Ashley Burch

Associate Art Director
Chris Linnen

Photo Editor
Brandon Jakobeit

Contributing Photographers
Jesse Cancelmo, Christ Chávez, Clark Crenshaw, Theresa DiMenno, Sean Fitzgerald, Russell Graves, Melanie Grizzel, Tom McCarthy Jr., Laurence Parent, Eric W. Pohl, Erich Schlegel

Contributing Illustrator
Kristen Uroda

Production Coordinator
Raquel V. Sanchez

MARKETING & BUSINESS
Associate Publisher
Sabrina Ballesteros

E-Commerce Marketing Manager
Allison Douglas

Strategic Partnerships Manager
Lois M. Rodriguez

Ancillary Publications Manager
Julie Stratton

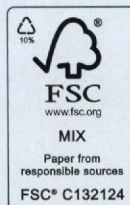
Business Manager
Karen Garza

Ancillary Publications Coordinator
LaKenna Cooks

Accounts Receivable
Ana Perez

Warehouse Manager
Oz Lopez

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MEMBER International Regional Magazine Association

Published monthly by the Travel Information Division of TxDOT

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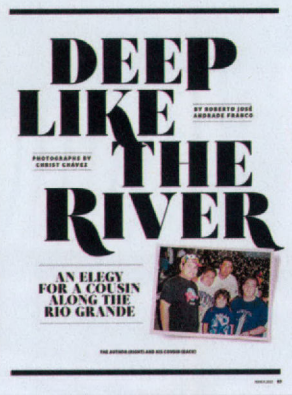
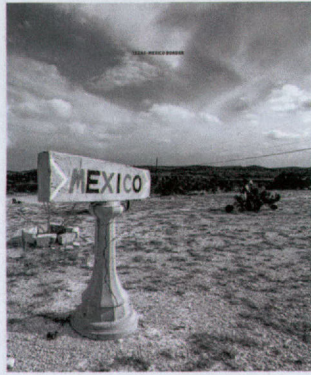
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MERGE




Sometimes a writer just tears a hole in your heart. Roberto José Andrade Franco did that to me in his article about his cousin. I don't think I'll ever drive from Boca Chica to Del Rio without thinking of Humberto Rosales.


Kim Johnson, Denver, Colorado

Pets on Board

There are so many places we have skipped because they're not pet friendly ["The Ultimate Guide to Traveling With Pets in Texas," February]. Looking forward to exploring all the places that are pet friendly!
 @pambluestein

As a family in the 1970s and '80s, we traveled Texas with our golden retriever, Honey, and German shepherd, Max, in a Volkswagen Vanagon camper with no AC ["Travels With Cleo," February]. The Texas heat is real.
 Vicki Mann-Hawthorne, Corpus Christi

Off-Beet

Our grandma always beat some puréed cooked red beets into chocolate cake batter to make red velvet cake ["Piece of Cake," February]. We never dyed our cakes red.
 Sandra Gail Gilbreath Wright, Mesquite

On Route 66

Although I realize Lauren Hough's article was a family reminiscence, a search for corroboration of her late grandfather's stories, Shamrock should not be mentioned in a Texas travel magazine without referencing some of its other notable tourist sites ["Getaway Driver," March]. A block west of the Pioneer West Museum is a monument encasing a fragment of Ireland's Blarney Stone, and a block south from the Blarney Stone is Texas' tallest water tower. And for Elvis fans, Hough's article ignored the most important information about the U-Drop Inn: You can sit in the booth where Elvis sat during a stop on a drive from Memphis to Hollywood. Shamrock was an unexpectedly interesting stop on my two-day backroads drive from Denver, Colorado, to Dallas.

Ruben Perlmutter, Dallas

I Need a Dog-Gone Break

As a person who hates dogs and is very

afraid of them because of too many bad experiences, I could tell from the cover of the February issue that it was a waste of my time. I understand how "pet ownership has skyrocketed," but that has only increased my anxiety. All too often, I meet dogs off leashes and find piles of dog waste on my daily walks in neighborhood parks, not to mention their presence in places where they simply do not belong. If anything, this issue has informed me where not to visit, but I fear that few such places still exist. How about an issue dedicated to people like me: childless by choice who want to get away from absolutely everyone and everything? I can't be the only one who looks to the Texas highways to escape it all.

Julie Anne Sweet, Waco

Taking Stock

One of, if not the, best memories of my youth was attending the "Fat Stock Show" and all of the activities during that event ["Best in Show," February]. I loved the smell of the hay and cattle. Always felt

like somewhere in my DNA was the need to be on a ranch or farm. Oh well—at least I have the memories!

Janet Joyce Keel Butler, Kerrville

100-Year-Old Deli-ght

Having grown up in the Victoria area during my formative years, I ate at Fossatti's every chance I could ["Sandwiched in History," December]. Their Reuben still reigns as the best with a close second nowhere in sight. Now living in Fort Worth, I stop by two or three times a year as I head to Yoakum, about a half-hour away, to visit Mom. As Victoria grows and expands northward, the trip to downtown requires a little more effort; however, the trouble of doing so is well worth the time invested. Don't miss out on tasting the very essence of what makes this eatery legendary. It does have that family appeal, which is what is at the heart of this great Texas icon. Here's to another hundred years of great food and atmosphere.

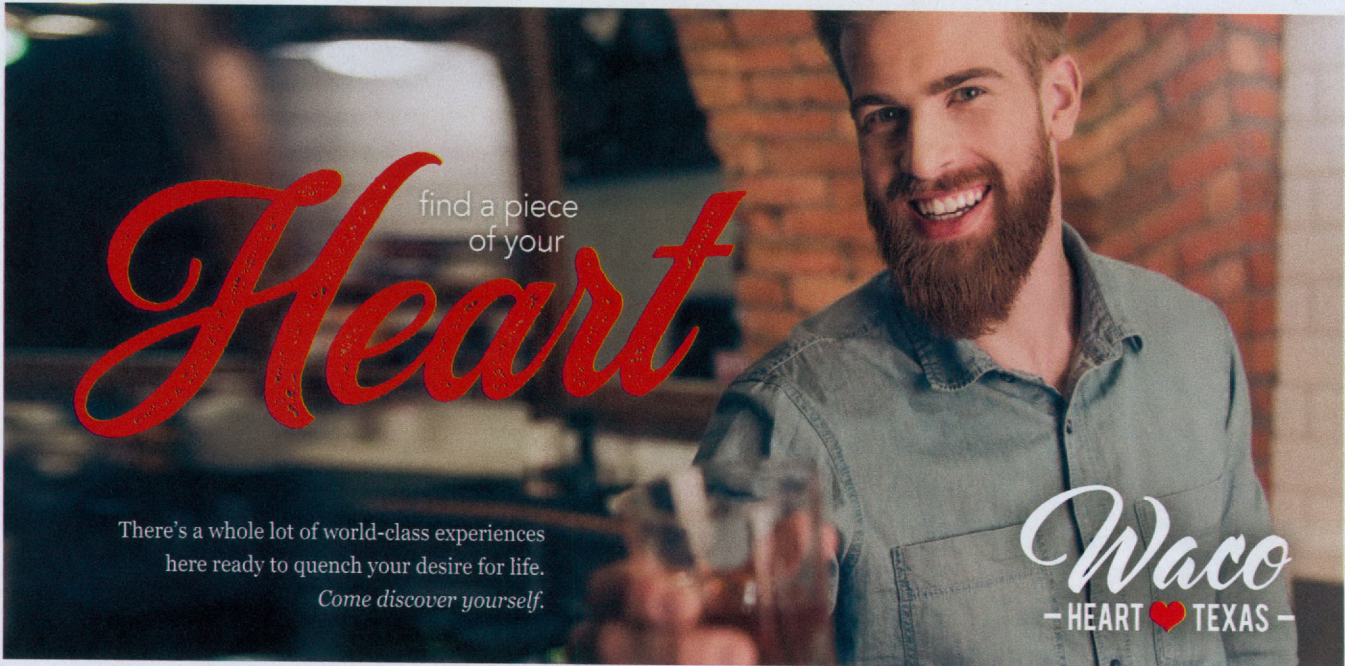
Phillip E. Schwab, Fort Worth



Double Whammy

Sean Fitzgerald is always up for a thrill ride. “I used to go to Six Flags a lot when I was younger,” the Dallas-based photographer says. “While the rides and coasters have changed, the sounds and smells and buzz in the air are all the same. It makes me feel like a kid again.” While photographing roller coasters at Six Flags Over Texas in Arlington for “Upside-Down Smile” (Page 21), Fitzgerald turned his camera to the sky to capture two adjacent rides: The Riddler Revenge, a pendulum that swings riders 147 feet high at up to 70 mph; and the Texas SkyScreamer, which twirls riders in a circle nearly 400 feet in the air. “I love the motion and energy,” he says. “That was really the feeling I wanted to show.”





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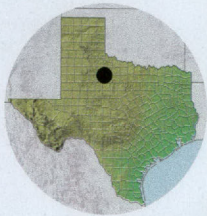


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Haskell

Pharmacist Lonnie Meredith found a calling and community in the Big Country

By Russell A. Graves



LONNIE MEREDITH, a rancher and retired pharmacist, appreciates Haskell's agricultural roots, which are celebrated in a local mural by Calina Mishay Johnson.

Before Western settlers arrived and settled Haskell, nomadic bands of Apache, Comanche, Kiowa, and Kickapoo hunted bison across northwest Texas. Today, these vast Rolling Plains surround Haskell—the Haskell County seat and a local economy anchored by mom and pop businesses. Pharmacist Lonnie Meredith moved to Haskell in 1991 to work at the local pharmacy, The Drug Store, a business he bought nine years later. Living an hour’s drive from Abilene and a 90-minute drive from Wichita Falls, residents in this slice of the Big Country rely on the local pharmacy for prescriptions and other medicines. Though he retired in 2020 and sold The Drug Store to another independent owner, Meredith remains active in the community as a cattle rancher. Ranching has long been a cornerstone of the regional economy, along with farming and oil production. “The town square is an exciting place because we have a vibrant downtown with an art gallery, great antiques stores, a floral shop, and a bunch of other businesses,” Meredith says.

Land of Opportunity

“I was raised in Marble Falls in a ranching family. By the time I was ready to raise a family, the community had grown so much it no longer had the feeling I was looking for. Haskell fit the bill because it’s a small agricultural community with wonderful people. I wanted to raise my children in a small town because there are more opportunities to learn a good work ethic and be exposed to experiences urban children never see.”

Healthy Choices

“Being a pharmacist for 36 years, I served the community by helping people maintain their health. We tried to be a one-stop shop by providing services a lot of big-box pharmacies don’t provide so the community didn’t have to drive an hour away. We provided medicine compounding, home medical equipment, and deliveries within a 30-mile radius, and we took the time to really know our customers and their needs. Being a small business owner has been one of the most fulfilling aspects of my life—identifying a need in the community and experiencing the community’s gratefulness in serving them.”

News and Notes

“The best place to get info on what’s going on around town used to be Tommy’s Barber Shop. Before Tommy passed away last year, he’d cut hair at the same place for 40 years. It’s close to city hall, and me and others would go hang out there even when we didn’t need a haircut. You’d go there to find out the stuff that you can’t get on the internet. Since he died, the local development corporation is looking for a new barber to take over.”

Local Eats

“Like other businesses in Haskell, many of our best restaurants are family-owned. I like the Double A Drive Inn. They have the best steak fingers and soft-serve ice cream in West Texas. For good Mexican food, I’ll pick Mi Familia over all of them. For Asian cuisine, you can’t beat China Wok. There’s also The Ugly Mug Kitchen, which is kind of like a redneck Starbucks. They’ve got different kinds of coffee and a variety of breakfast and lunch dishes.”

Ranch Rodeo

“The Working Ranch Cowboys Association puts on a ranch rodeo the first weekend in June. It’s called Wild Horse Prairie Days and is named for an elevated knob in western Haskell County that was used by the Indians to look for wild horses. The Fort Sam Museum & Auxiliary is also a nice attraction. It has a military flair to it. Sam Baker is the owner, and he has a lot of old Jeeps and other military vehicles. He also has a Mustang car collection.”

Nickel Tour

“Haskell is a small place, so it doesn’t take long to drive through town. But I tell people to drive around the area and see all the pretty farms and ranches. Go southeast of town and you’ll see one of the nation’s largest solar farms [Alamo 7]. When you are back in town, go by Heads or Tails Hats. They’re local hat merchants who’ve made custom hats for several Miss Rodeo America and Miss Rodeo Texas title holders. Aside from that, anywhere on the edge of town is a wonderful place for sunrises and sunsets. They are the best out here.” 🐾



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at Six Flags Over
Texas in Arlington.



FROM LEFT: The Phoenix, formerly the Rocket, was relocated to Pennsylvania from Texas; Aquaman: Power Wave will debut this year in Arlington.

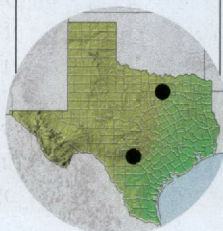
Upside-Down Smile

New roller coasters will take gravity-defying enthusiasts to a higher level

By Andrea Luttrell

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As a kid, I considered the Judge Roy Scream roller coaster at Six Flags Over Texas to be my personal Everest. The ride debuted at the Arlington amusement park in 1980, borrowing its name from Judge Roy Bean, the infamous adventurer-turned-Texas justice of the peace, who survived being hanged after he shot a Mexican official over Bean's entanglement with a woman. Considering the coaster's seemingly dangerous drop of 65 feet, I wondered about my own chances of survival. It was 1989, and I was 11. My hair permed; my bangs teased up high for my first amusement park visit. I wanted to be like my teenage babysitters who bragged about the "gnarly" coasters they rode at Six Flags—the Shock Wave, the Flashback, the Cliffhanger. Instead, I looked at the Judge Roy with a mixture of terror and excitement. I



balked two or three times, having to leave the line, before I finally triumphed. But the minute I stepped out of the coaster car, I queued up to go again.

I haven't experienced that emotional cocktail of fascination and dread in quite some time. Like so many people, the pandemic has held me captive to tamer delights. But once vaccinated, I began to gravitate toward that flush of controlled adrenaline, so different from the real terror of COVID-19. Every time I drove from Dallas to see friends in Fort Worth, I'd watch the Six Flags coasters rise along Interstate 30 like totems of a happier time. I can't count the hours I'd spent darting around that park, first as a kid with my parents, then as a teenager with my friends, stretching the bounds of my nascent freedom. My nostalgia peaked recently, when I heard about the new dive coaster opening at San Antonio's Six Flags Fiesta Texas this summer. Known as Dr. Diabolical's Cliffhanger, it's the steepest of its kind in the world, with a 150-foot dip at 60 mph, a zero-gravity roll, and a 75-foot near-vertical decline.

"What a dive coaster does is it hangs you right at the top," said Tim Baldwin, an editor for Arlington-based *Amusement Today* magazine. "You climb the lift, take the curve, and just before you take the 95-degree drop, it's going to hold you there for a few seconds in a brake, so you're just staring straight down to build that anticipation. And people will look up and point."

The imposing Dr. Diabolical is the newest entry in the long history of Texas

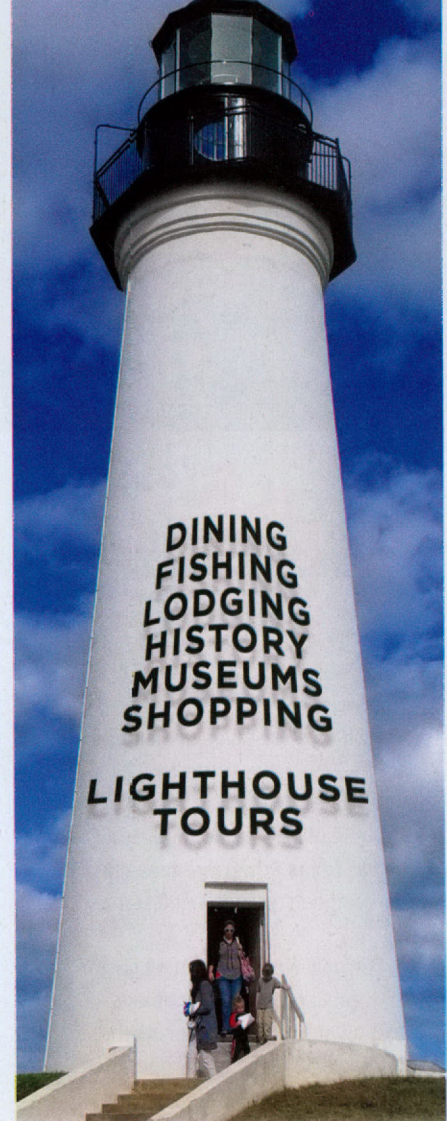
roller coasters. Back in the early days of amusement parks, before the reign of Six Flags, SeaWorld, and Astroworld (R.I.P.), thrill-seekers rode wooden roller coasters at local parks, seaside boardwalks, and small locally run operations. In 1911, Crystal Palace Park in Galveston featured a figure-8 wooden roller coaster, Mountain Speedway, that ran for 50 years. "It probably didn't go that fast," Baldwin said. "Ten miles an hour may have been really thrilling back then."

When I randomly mentioned to my friend that the Shock Wave coaster at Six Flags Over Texas was once the tallest in the world, he replied, "If you're getting into this stuff, you need to call my friend Ben. He's a roller-coaster expert." Ben Burnett is a volunteer for Grand Prairie-based American Coaster Enthusiasts, a membership organization founded in 1978 to celebrate and preserve roller coasters through events, advocacy work, and publications.

Burnett's been riding coasters since he was 17 months old. He educated me about bygone coasters around the metroplex. He said the Bishop Arts District once had an amusement park with a "shoot-the-chute" that would swoop down into a pool, soaking riders. He also reminded me of Sandy Lake, an amusement park in Carrollton. When he mentioned it, I was flooded with memories of a required 6th grade crush—a rush on par with the park's mini-coaster.

"It used to be that families would go to these places and spend their time and money on weekends, enjoying the

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Texas has a rich history of wooden roller coasters. See what you're made of on these rickety rides.

At SeaWorld San Antonio, brave the **Texas Stingray**—the tallest wooden coaster in the state.

The only wooden shuttle coaster on Earth, the **Switchback**, awaits at ZDT's Amusement Park, a family-friendly operation in Seguin.

After cruising the Kemah Boardwalk on the Gulf Coast, try the **Boardwalk Bullet**, one of the most compact wooden roller coasters in the world.

Bonus: The **Rocket**, a wooden coaster that ran from 1947 to 1980 in San Antonio, found new life at Knoebels Amusement Resort in Pennsylvania after the owner relocated it from Texas, reassembled it, and renamed it the **Phoenix**.

FROM LEFT:

Dr. Diabolical's Cliffhanger is the steepest dive coaster in the world; The New Texas Giant is a rider favorite.

rides and the park," Burnett said. "But over time, people stopped doing that as much, partly because people who were interested in doing that started going to Six Flags."

Six Flags elevated the roller-coaster scene on both a state and national level. Angus Wynne Jr., a businessman and developer, founded the Arlington park in 1961 after a visit to Disneyland in California. Wynne thought a theme park would attract families to the nearby Great Southwest Industrial District, a planned community he helped create. In the 1970s and '80s, as theme parks proliferated around the country, Six Flags set an example that Wynne hoped would be as large as Disney but more accessible. Six Flags parks can now be found throughout North America, with 27 sites across the United States, Mexico, and Canada. But the flagship is still Six Flags Over Texas in

Arlington, which continues to innovate.

"There are so many firsts here, like the log flume and the mine train," said Brad Malone, marketing and communications manager for the park. "The runaway mine train has been replicated across the world. You see them at Disney, at other Six Flags parks, but the first one was here. It's been 11 years since the New Texas Giant opened in 2011. Many people say it's our best ride."

I am ride or die New Texas Giant. I remember first buckling into its cars and swooping down the 143-foot drop when it opened as the Texas Giant in 1990. Built as a traditional wooden coaster, it shook and bounced you around the track until your bones and teeth rattled. Once steel coasters introduced smoother and bigger rides, the Giant's popularity waned. To ensure the coaster endured, Six Flags Over Texas hired Rocky Mountain Construction in Idaho to perform a major renovation.

“They converted it from a wooden roller coaster to a hybrid of a wooden roller coaster and steel coaster,” Burnett explained. “The supports are all still wooden, and you get that creaky wooden roller-coaster feel, but because the track is steel high beams, it stays really smooth and can run for years and years.”

A new coaster on the horizon in Arlington threatens the New Texas Giant’s eminence. This year, Six Flags Over Texas will debut Aquaman: Power Wave, a water coaster that will be the first of its kind in North America. Baldwin has seen the specs and said it will function almost like a shuttle, ushering its riders forward and backward over a body of water. “On the very last pass, a reservoir pond fills in with water, so in the last plunge through, you make this gigantic wave,” Baldwin said. “You will get wet. It should be a huge wall of water.”

No matter the style of coaster, for the enthusiast it’s all about the adrenaline. I could go academic here and talk about Freudian notions of the Death Drive, but really, I think it’s something simpler. Life can be scary, a fact thrown in high relief these past few years. Being able to conquer a fear, to do something that seems like it could kill you but is generally safe, offers a type of freedom. That excitement feels like power.

I went back to Six Flags Over Texas around Halloween to delight in the ghoulish wonders of Fright Fest. I stood in line for the New Texas Giant with pit-of-the-stomach butterflies while watching people, arms up, screaming with delight as they traversed the first big drop. Toward the front of the line, I saw a little boy and his mother. He was debating whether to retreat to the chicken coop—a designated bailout zone where the petrified can wait while their friends ride. His mother cajoled and reassured him, and when our turn came, he braved it, sitting a few cars behind me. After the ride—an exciting, bottom-lifting-off-the-seat few minutes—I looked behind me to see his reaction. He beamed, grabbing his mother by the arm. “Can we go again?” he asked. 🐼



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Take Off

The first airplane built and flown in Texas soars at Midland International Airport


By Julia Jones

The small crowd that witnessed the first flight of John Valentine Pliska's airplane likely held its collective breath. It was 1912—nine years after the Wright brothers' groundbreaking flight—when the Austrian blacksmith's plane became the first ever built and flown in Texas. His creation exhibited jury-rigged yet sturdy construction, incorporating wood, piano wire, and tin. Windmill parts formed much of the structure, and its wings, stretching 33 feet, were made of shellacked canvas.

“Building this aeroplane was not like building a complicated piece of machinery in some steel and iron industrial center today,” wrote Mary Beth Pliska, Pliska's daughter, in her 1965 book *A Blacksmith's Aeroplane*. “This revolutionary and complicated craft was literally built with their bare hands.”

Pliska immigrated to Central Texas in 1896 with his family at age 17 after studying at a balloon and glider school as a compulsory trainee of the Austro-Hungarian Army. He worked at his father's smithy in Flatonia before marrying Louise Hundle and moving to Midland in 1907. There, he and his new brother-in-law founded a blacksmith shop, and he began building his plane.

In November 1911, Pliska drew inspiration from famed aviator Robert G. Fowler landing a Wright biplane—an early model with two sets of wings, one atop the other—in Midland on a cross-country flight. Pliska and local mechanic Gray Coggin, who studied aviation with the Wrights, completed Pliska's biplane a year later. They flew it over a local ranch for 15 minutes, the vessel's maximum fly time since its engine, which was purchased in Ohio, wasn't built for Midland's high elevation.

After a disappointing showing at Odessa's 1912 Independence Day Festival—and to allay Louise's fears and avoid a costly engine replacement—Pliska stopped flying the plane that same year. It hung in the rafters of his blacksmith shop, formerly on the corner of Texas Avenue and Baird Street, until Pliska's children donated it to the city in 1962. Visitors to the Midland International Airport can view the relic of ingenuity suspended over the baggage claim. *For more information, visit flymaf.com.* 

The Wild Blue Yonder

Scuba diving opens up new worlds beneath Texas waters

By Melissa Gaskill



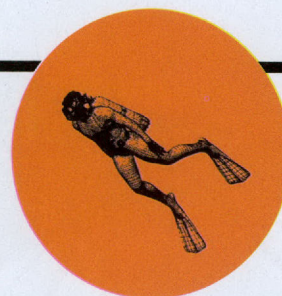
Blue Lagoon
in Huntsville

For centuries, people have plunged underwater, whether to search for abalone, catch fish, collect pearls, or simply explore. Early Greeks used hollow reeds to breathe underwater, and Leonardo da Vinci brainstormed early diving suits in Renaissance Italy. In the 1940s, Frenchmen Jacques Cousteau and Emile Gagnan created the Aqua-lung, the first self-contained underwater breathing apparatus (scuba), which eventually led to recreational diving.

With 367 miles of coastline and plentiful bodies of water, Texas offers many diving venues for the country's 3 million certified scuba divers. "Diving is the closest thing to weightlessness you can experience," says Thom Hardy, chief science officer for the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment in San Marcos. "It's a whole different world you cannot get to otherwise."

Scuba certification, available to divers age 15 and up (10 for a junior certification), typically takes a few days of classroom instruction and two days in a pool followed by four open-water dives in a lake or the ocean. Advanced certifications are available for those who want to expand their basic knowledge and take several hours to several months to complete.

Texas has a wealth of scuba shops providing certification and equipment including masks, dive computers, and wetsuits. Most offer diving trips to places around Texas and the world.



Divine Dives

Flower Garden Banks. Known as "the Texas Caribbean," this national marine sanctuary in the Gulf of Mexico harbors the same corals and fish as the actual Caribbean. Fling Charters in Freeport brings divers on overnight trips for up to a dozen dives at different sites.

*flowergarden.noaa.gov;
flingcharters.com*

Artificial reefs. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Artificial Reef Program includes the 371-foot Kraken, 67 miles off the coast of Galveston, and the 473-foot Texas Clipper, 17 miles off South Padre Island. Dive shops provide day trips to these sites. *tpwd.texas.gov*

Spring Lake. The training area at this San Marcos lake features clear waters and a consistent temperature. The lake is a habitat for fish and turtles.

meadowscenter.txstate.edu

Balmorhea State Park. Bring a buddy to dive into the crystal-clear, 3.5-million-gallon pool an hour west of Fort Stockton.

Springs bubble from the bottom, and resident fish include the Mexican tetra and endangered Comanche Springs pupfish and Pecos gambusia. *tpwd.texas.gov*

Lakes and quarries. Scattered around Texas, options include Lake Travis in Austin, Blue Lagoon in Huntsville, Mammoth Lake in Clute, and Reveille Peak Ranch in Burnet. Ask local dive shops for recommendations.

160

Size, in square miles, of Flower Garden Banks in the Gulf of Mexico

130

Maximum depth, in feet, for recreational diving

4

Number of open-water dives it takes to earn a scuba certification

Snorkeling for Science

Working with scientists, volunteer divers can contribute to underwater research. Divers are crucial to ongoing studies of fish and reef structures at Spring Lake in San Marcos and the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary—a coral reef ecosystem 115 miles out in the Gulf of Mexico.

“Scientists have a lot of tools for collecting data, but they don’t have that human factor,” says Marissa Nuttall, a research biologist at the sanctuary. “It’s also pretty hard to collect a specific fish with a remotely operated vehicle, or sample fragile corals.”

Scientific researchers at Flower Garden Banks and Spring Lake provide training for volunteers. Divers assess the condition of the reef and survey fish density and species

abundance for a decades-long monitoring project at Flower Garden. The sanctuary maintains a database of manta ray photos taken by staff and recreational divers and uses it to track individual animals. This work led to the discovery that young mantas use the protected area as a nursery.

Most science diving in Spring Lake is related to endangered-species monitoring and habitat-restoration activities like removing vegetation around springs or counting fish, Hardy says.

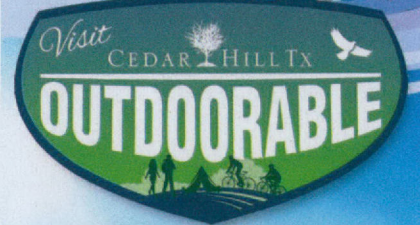
Scuba certification courses are available at local dive shops throughout Texas. Once a diver completes a course certified by Scuba Schools International or the Professional Association of Dive Instructors, they can train to become a volunteer diver.



Flower Garden Banks in the Gulf of Mexico

Photos: Erich Schlegel (left); Jesse Cancelmo (right)

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Beat of a Different Drum

Find Big Bend heritage and desert-mountain air in Alpine

By Laurel Miller

Alpine may not attract an international art crowd like nearby Marfa, but fans of West Texas know this scrappy Trans-Pecos railroad and ranching town merits a closer look. The local arts community, fueled in part by students and faculty at Sul Ross State University, supports an entertaining lineup of local galleries, music venues, and the distinctive Museum of the Big Bend. Set at the foot of the Davis Mountains, Alpine also serves as a base for outdoor enthusiasts who relish the high-desert climate and regional opportunities for hiking, biking, camping, horseback riding, and paddling. Accommodations range from the 94-year-old Holland Hotel to chain hotels and upscale vacation rentals.

The Quarter Circle 7 resort includes Hotel Parker and the Spicewood Restaurant.



San Antonio

5.5 hours

Austin

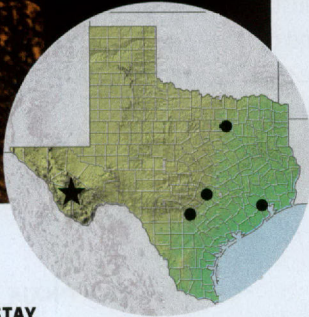
6.5 hours

Dallas

7.5 hours

Houston

8.5 hours



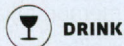
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6

5



3



2

8



1 / ANTELOPE LODGE This 1950s motor hotel sits on the west end of town. The hand-crafted stucco, stone, and red-clay cottages surround a garden courtyard. Starting at \$85 per night, the rooms are decorated in a minimalist, Southwestern aesthetic, with colorful textiles and abundant light.



2 / JUDY'S BREAD AND BREAKFAST A lively cross-section of Alpine locals and tourists congregate at this friendly eatery known for its pastries, such as gooey cinnamon rolls and iced doughnuts, and hefty portions of breakfast classics like biscuits and gravy. Lunch items include salads, sandwiches, and wraps.



3 / ALLEYWAY MURALS Grab a map from your hotel or visitalpinetx.com and hit the streets for a mural tour. For years, local artists have depicted the landscape, industry, and culture of the Big Bend on buildings and a telephone pole or two. A separate "walking and windshield" tour explores historical and cultural sites.



4 / MUSEUM OF THE BIG BEND Located on the Sul Ross State University campus, this paean to West Texas covers topics from regional history and industry to early cartography and fine art. Art aficionados should bookmark Trappings of Texas, an annual Western art showcase. The 2022 show runs Sept. 15–Nov. 5.



5 / MURPHY STREET Several compact blocks paralleling the train tracks comprise this historical hub of Alpine's Latino population. Originally known as Southside, it was established by the families of rail workers and includes original storefronts, some of them brightly restored. Browse the galleries, boutiques, and Petit Bijou café.



6 / CHIHUAHUAN DESERT RESEARCH INSTITUTE Twenty miles northwest of town, this 507-acre nature center interprets the Trans-Pecos ecosystem with botanical gardens, hiking trails, and exhibits on local mining, wildlife, and geology. Don't miss the cactus museum containing more than 200 varieties.



7 / SPICEWOOD AT QUARTER CIRCLE 7 Inspired by "cattleman's hospitality," the restaurant and patio at the rustic-modern Hotel Parker boast panoramic views of the Twin Peaks mountains and surrounding desert. Try the fully loaded Hatch green chile burger with bacon aioli.



8 / HARRY'S TINAJA The best dive bars wear their history on their walls, and Harry's is no exception. With an Old West saloon vibe, the building's interior, including the ceiling, is covered with memorabilia, taxidermy, dollar bills, and scribbles. Join the regulars at the bar or on the outdoor patio and sit a spell. 🌵



Viva Big Bend

This five-day summer event, scheduled for July 27-31, was established a decade ago to support the Big Bend's music industry, venues, and performers. Nearly 60 live performances are held at bars, pavilions, hotels, and clubs throughout Alpine, Marathon, Fort Davis, Marfa, and Terlingua. Consider this a musical road trip where you can hear talents like Dale Watson, Django Walker, Summer Dean, the Doodlin' Hogwallops, and Two Tons of Steel. vivabigbend.com

Lost Alaskan RV Park is 1.5 miles from downtown on a tidy property planted with pine trees. Escape the afternoon heat with a dip in the pool. Other amenities include laundry, barbecue grills, a dog park, a playground, tent sites, and rental cabins. 2401 State Highway 118; 432-837-1136. lostalaskan.com

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Such was the serendipitous meeting of Raymond Bowers and his future wife upon his return to New York from the Pacific theater. A young WAAC was processing his separation papers — Florence, he would soon learn.

It was love at first sight, and they were immediately inseparable. On the day after they met, they left for Massachusetts so Raymond could meet Florence's family. They boarded a northbound train, but before they even got through Connecticut, they disembarked and wed.

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BY JOE NICK PATOSKI
PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIST CHAVEZ

ELEVATED

OUTLOOK



EXPERIENCE LIFE IN TEXAS' HIGHEST
COMMUNITY AT MCDONALD OBSERVATORY



AWE IS AN ELUSIVE EMOTION,

but that pretty much sums up the feeling that welled inside me at Astronomers Lodge, the highest lodging in Texas. At the tippy top of Mount Locke in the Davis Mountains of far West Texas, the two-story building perched at 6,700 feet provides sleeping accommodations for astronomers, teachers, and students visiting the University of Texas at Austin's McDonald Observatory, one of the world's premier facilities for astronomical research. For two nights last fall, my wife, Kris, and I were among the guests of these rarified quarters.

As you might expect for an academic research station, the amenities at the 16-room lodge are basic. Our room was adequately equipped with a queen bed, a bathroom, and heavy-duty blackout blinds. Photos and paintings on the walls depict stars, planets, and other celestial bodies.

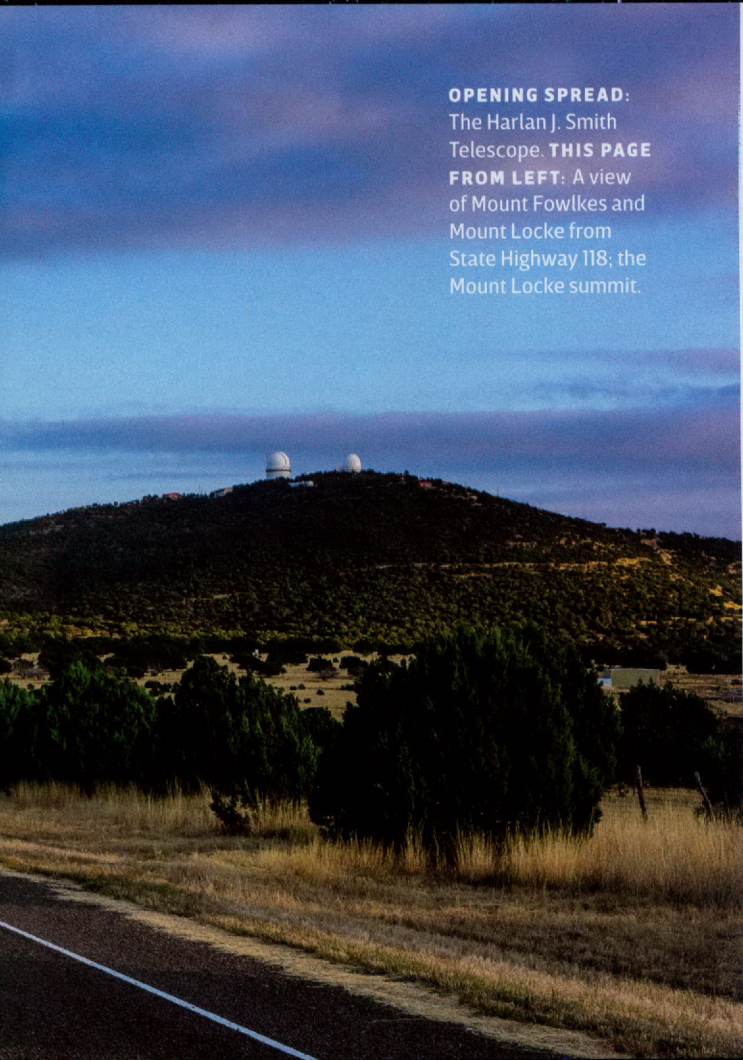
But we weren't seeking high-thread-count sheets or luxury shampoo. We were there for the full-on McDonald

Observatory experience. Along with participating in a Special Viewing Nights program—a guided viewing of the night sky using high-powered telescopes—we experienced the behind-the-scenes look that comes with an overnight stay. Our itinerary also included daytime tours of the big telescopes and one of the observatory's popular Star Party programs.

Once the exclusive domain of astronomers, caretakers, and university officials, Astronomers Lodge now welcomes a limited number of regular outer space cadets like me who are visiting the observatory for special events. If rooms are available, participants in the Special Viewing Nights and Star Party programs can also book a night at the lodge.

After the sun went down, Kris and I got our bearings. We learned to move around in the dimly lit lodge, guided by soft red lights in the hallway. Window blinds in the rooms and the dining hall remain tightly closed after dark to eliminate leaking artificial light that could interfere with the astronomers' work.

Our visit coincided with a full moon, meaning it wasn't the best conditions for stargazing. But I set my alarm for 2:30 a.m. anyway to see a near total



OPENING SPREAD: The Harlan J. Smith Telescope. **THIS PAGE FROM LEFT:** A view of Mount Fowlkes and Mount Locke from State Highway 118; the Mount Locke summit.

lunar eclipse. Feeling my way down the hall and outside, I viewed the full moon overhead as the earth's shadow covered it, allowing the stars to briefly illuminate the sky, as they do so well out here.

The next morning, dawn delivered a surprise payoff. As I peeked out of our room's window, first light revealed a mountain landscape of pale shades of brown set against a brightening cloudless backdrop. The blinds in the dining room were opened for breakfast, revealing even more glorious terrain. Rays of golden light illuminated distant peaks and the metallic dome of the Hobby-Eberly Telescope on Mount Fowlkes to the north.

As far as my eyes could see, serenity ruled. Other than the observatory grounds, the stock tank on a neighboring ranch, and a scattering of residences far away in Limpia Crossing, the sweeping vista was devoid of humanity. Even when it's cloudy and lousy for stargazing, the view from the lodge remains sublime, says Stephen Hummel, the observatory's dark skies specialist, who works with regional communities to reduce light pollution. Hummel has built an Instagram following of thousands for his celestial photography in the Davis Mountains. "In fall and winter, we'll be above the clouds here," he says. "The sky above, the clouds below."

THE MCDONALD OBSERVATORY traces its origins to an unlikely benefactor. William McDonald, a bachelor banker from the northeast Texas town of Paris, bequeathed his

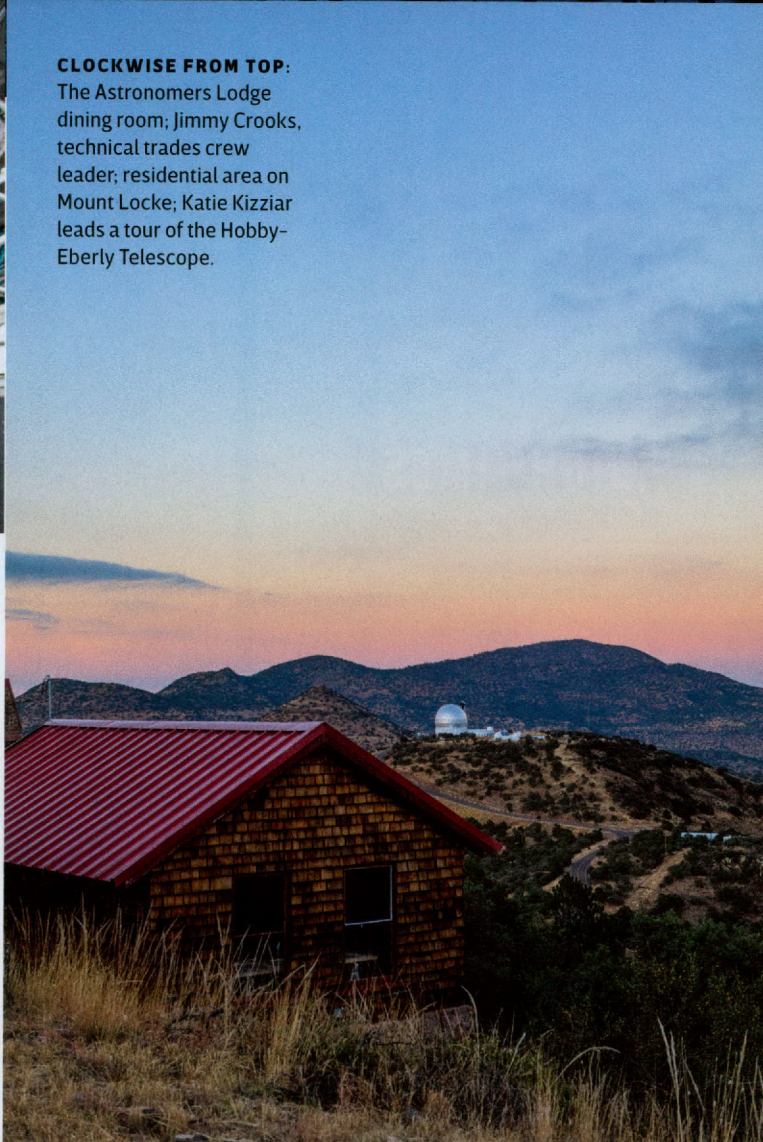
HIGH TIMES

MCDONALD OBSERVATORY offers a range of visitor experiences, from exhibits at the visitors center to telescope viewings for small groups. **Star Parties** (see Page 39) cost \$25. **Special Viewing Nights**, which last three hours and are limited to 15 guests, cost \$150 to use the 82-inch telescope and \$100 for the 36-inch telescope. When rooms are available, event participants can book a room at **Astronomers Lodge**. The rate is \$141.25 per night for one person or \$214.70 for two, taxes and meals included. One suite is available for families with children under 10 for \$288.15 per night. For more information on Astronomers Lodge, call 432-426-4139. McDonald Observatory will hold its inaugural **Dark Skies Festival** on April 29-30 with activities including facility tours, telescope viewings, live music, and guest speakers.
mcdonaldobservatory.org





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
 The Astronomers Lodge dining room; Jimmy Crooks, technical trades crew leader; residential area on Mount Locke; Katie Kizziar leads a tour of the Hobby-Eberly Telescope.



estate to the University of Texas in 1926 for the purpose of building an observatory. Never mind the university didn't have an astronomy department at the time.

McDonald did not study the sciences, and he was not affiliated with the University of Texas, says Katie Kizziar, the observatory's assistant director for education and outreach. "But he left the bulk of his estate specifically for the formation of an astronomical observatory in Texas."

McDonald donated enough money to build a telescope but not to buy the land. After determining the ideal site—the Davis Mountains were already renowned for dark skies—UT officials wrote a letter to the McIvor family, who owned one of the largest ranches in the Davis Mountains. In 1933, the McIvors agreed to donate what is now Mount Locke for the construction of the first telescope. The estate of Fort Davis Judge Edwin H. Fowlkes followed up with the donation of the adjacent mountain, later home to another scope.



"IN FALL AND
WINTER WE'LL
BE ABOVE THE
CLOUDS HERE.
THE SKY ABOVE,
THE CLOUDS
BELOW."

Per McDonald's wishes, the new facility was for "the study and the promotion of the study of astronomical science." McDonald Observatory takes the "promotion" part of the mission to heart. It employs a full-time educational staff to welcome the public, holds teacher workshops in the summer, and serves as an example to other observatories for how to do outreach and education.

During my visit, Kizziar led Kris and me on a personalized tour, starting in the white dome housing the 82-inch telescope, named the Otto Struve in honor of the observatory's first director. The telescope—informally known as "The Grand Old Lady"—was the second largest in the world when it was completed in 1939. Its dome structure at the time was a self-contained facility with sleeping quarters, kitchen, library, photo darkroom, and offices. Using the Struve, astronomers have made significant discoveries, including the detection of carbon dioxide in Mars' atmosphere and the existence of a fifth moon around Uranus.

The Harlan J. Smith telescope came online in 1968, and at 107 inches was then the third largest scope in the world. It's named for the observatory's director from 1963–1989. Smith oversaw the growth spurt that included this second research telescope, the addition of a visitors center, and construction of the first on-site residences and Astronomers Lodge. "That was when the astronomy department really kicked off," Kizziar says. Just this past December, a team led by recent UT Austin doctoral graduate María José Bustamante used the Smith telescope to discover an unusually massive black hole in the center of one of the Milky Way's satellite galaxies.

Next, we drove down Mount Locke and about a mile across a saddle to Mount Fowlkes, site of the Hobby-Eberly Telescope, dedicated in 1997. At 400 inches, it's one of the biggest optical telescopes in the world. A joint venture of several universities around the world including UT and Texas A&M University, the Hobby-Eberly is known for its study of dark energy, looking back in time for clues about the universe's quickening expansion



CLOCKWISE: A Star Party presentation; posing for pictures before the Star Party; an Otto Struve Telescope model in the visitors center.



The Hobby-Eberly is likely to be the last giant telescope built in the Davis Mountains. A consortium including UT and A&M is building the Giant Magellan Telescope in Chile, a location chosen for its high altitude, dry climate, and isolation from light pollution. When finished in 2029, it will be the world's largest ground-based telescope, more than three times the size of the Hobby-Eberly.

rate. We donned hard hats to do a walkaround inside the Hobby-Eberly's geodesic dome. Unlike the big telescopes on Mount Locke, which look like what one would typically think of as a telescope with a large tube and an eyepiece to view the sky, the Hobby-Eberly is basically a giant curved array of 91 mirrors that gather and interpret light.

"All of the telescopes collect information by a spectrograph, which separates incoming light by wavelength or frequency and records the resulting spectrum," Kizziar explains. For the largest projects, massive amounts of data are piped to a supercomputer at UT Austin.

In 2017, after a \$40 million upgrade, the Hobby-Eberly Telescope began the Dark Energy Experiment, Kizziar says, "examining 1 million galaxies to probe the universe of dark energy, which is causing the universe to expand faster as it ages."

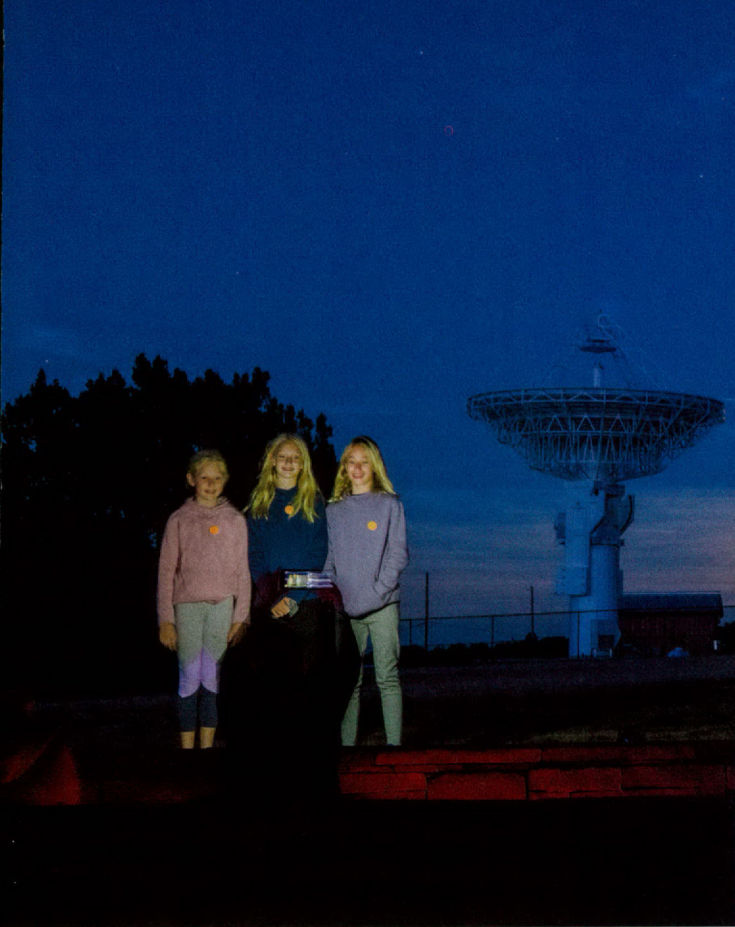
We stop to look at the mirror room, where technicians clean the scope's 91 mirrors. "Mirror techs have to have fine motor skills," Kizziar says, pointing out that one former tech has a fine arts degree.

WITH NUMEROUS TELESCOPES, the 12,000-square-foot Frank N. Bash Visitors Center, and various support buildings, McDonald Observatory functions like its own little town. Sixty-four people currently live on-site, comprising the highest community in Texas. Locals call their home "the Mountain." When someone drives 16 miles down to Fort Davis—the closest place for gas, groceries, schools, churches, and other essentials—they're "off-Mountain."

"We are the largest permanent employer in Jeff Davis County with about 80 employees eligible for jury duty," notes Dr. Teznie Pugh, superintendent of McDonald Observatory.

Pugh functions like a combination mayor-city manager with the added responsibility of science operations. Along with technical oversight of many of the research telescopes, Pugh manages the observatory facilities and maintains relations with local governments and businesses.

"In a single week, I could be helping to run a sewer snake, collecting science data using a world-class research facility, writing our latest job posting, presenting at a local government meeting, submitting a requirements document for our latest upgrade project, and reviewing bids on a housing renovation project," she says. "Also, I get to go home to



PARTY WITH THE STARS

some of the best views in Texas.”

Jimmy Crooks, the resident “Mr. Fix-It,” found his first job on the Mountain working on a home remodel. He ended up staying and marrying Kizziar. They are one of several couples who met at McDonald.

Crooks is on call for HVAC repairs, hydraulic maintenance, and repairs to the electrical, water, and sewage systems. In exchange, he gets to live in the highest community in Texas.

“You never know what’s going to go wrong,” says Crooks as he fills out forms at the physical plant, which houses two firetrucks and an array of heavy equipment and machinery. “I have to be prepared to do everything. But living here means never waiting in line and never waiting at a stop light.”

Back at Astronomers Lodge, Karen Sulewski, the lodge manager, shows us around the kitchen and dining hall. Guests may make their own breakfast and coffee, while Sulewski and team serve lunch at noon and dinner at 5:30.

The lodge’s clientele is egalitarian. One week, it’s university students. The next week, it’s the board of directors of the Hobby-Eberly Telescope, convening from around the world. Whomever is visiting, the emphasis is on functionality, exemplified by the folding chairs and plastic table covers in the dining room. No one’s complaining, though. It’s a privilege being at McDonald Observatory. Just about everyone who has spent a night here knows location, location, and location is what makes this place special.

It’s not for everybody. But for those who get it, the pull is irresistible. “Whenever I feel too alone,” Hummel says, “I go outside and look up at the sky and say, ‘Yeah, it’s worth it.’”

AS DUSK FADES and astronomers prepare to open the powerful telescopes on Mount Locke and Mount Fowlkes, visitors gather several hundred feet below at the McDonald Observatory’s Frank N. Bash Visitors Center, preparing to do their own sky scanning.

The observatory’s popular Star Party program draws as many as 500 guests on Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday nights most weeks of the year for the chance to view celestial objects against the backdrop of some of the world’s darkest skies. (COVID-19 protocols have limited visitor capacity in recent months.)

Over two hours, guests learn about the night sky from astronomy experts and get the opportunity to look at constellations and galaxies through telescopes set up on the grounds outside of the visitors center.

“The staff shares a common love of astronomy,” says Stephen Hummel, the observatory’s dark skies specialist and a telescope operator during the Star Party I attend.

The evening begins with a presentation in the amphitheater, orienting the crowd to the arc of the planets, the Milky Way, and various constellations visible on the night of their visit. Then, guests make their way to the viewing telescopes.

During my visit, Saul Rivera, an observatory public affairs specialist, stands on the visitors center patio in front of a large screen showing a telescopic image of a planetary nebula called the Ring Nebula (Messier 57). A planetary nebula is created when a star runs low on hydrogen, then expands and expels its outer layers, which appear like a ring. What remains is only the hot core of the star, known as a white dwarf, which cools over billions of years. Stars like our sun eventually become white dwarves, as the sun will be in 6 billion years or so, puffing up then collapsing on itself, Rivera explains. More massive stars collapse into neutron stars. Really massive stars fall into themselves and become black holes.

It’s hard to fathom—mind-boggling, even. That’s what happens when you behold more stars than you ever imagined under the vast West Texas sky.

WHAT LIES



AN UNDERGROUND NETWORK OF THOUSANDS OF CAVES, SINKHOLES,
AND SPRINGS RESIDES BELOW OUR FEET, INVITING EXPLORATION



BY MELISSA GASKILL
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ERICH SCHLEGEL
& LAURENCE PARENT

BENEATH

CAVE WITHOUT A NAME

An hourlong tour traverses six major rooms with a variety of stalactites and stalagmites, including spectacular drapery displays. The Throne Room provides ideal acoustics for monthly musical performances. 325 Kreuzberg Road, Boerne. Tours: \$20 adults, \$10 children 6-12. Reservations recommended. 830-537-4212. cavewithoutaname.com



Caves form when water dissolves underground bedrock, primarily limestone. Texas has a lot of that, formed from sediments left behind by a sprawling ancient sea, making the state one of the top places in the country to spelunk. The caves in this limestone comprise a system of karsts, natural conduits for conveying rainwater into underground aquifers. Karsts provide the primary or sole water supply for about 25% of the world's population.

Each Texas cave has its own range of ecological treasures. Colton Moore's family has owned the land above Caverns of Sonora in West Texas for generations. His mother led tours while pregnant with him, and he started conducting tours of his own at 13. Highlights of the Sonora caverns include Horseshoe Lake, with waters so clear as to be almost invisible, and rooms filled with stalactites, stalagmites, and cave popcorn.

Natural Bridge Caverns in northern San Antonio is listed on the National Register of Historic Places due to its archaeological significance. In 1963, during excavations to develop a trail system inside the cavern, workers found animal remains alongside projectile points dating approximately 10,000 years old. Scientists from the Texas Memorial Museum and Vertebrate Paleontology Laboratory of the University of Texas collected the remains and identified some as species that became extinct about 12,000 years ago. Longhorn Cavern State Park in Burnet also sports a colorful history, with stories of it serving as a trap cage for prehistoric Texans to lure animals and as an underground dance hall.

About four hours southwest in Brackettville, Kickapoo Cavern State Park boasts the largest cave passage of any in Texas. The 1,400-foot cave is accessed through little more than a sizeable crack in the hillside, proof that you cannot judge a cave by its entrance, says George Veni, executive director of the National Cave and Karst Research Institute. "When you're climbing a mountain, you know where the top is," Veni says. "But exploring a cave, the goal, the end of the cave, is abstract. You can't see it and don't know where it is or what it will take to get there. It's pure exploration."

BACK IN 1938,

cave owner James Horne held a contest to choose the name for his cavern, 11 miles northeast of Boerne. The 9-year-old winner declared it too pretty to have one, and Cave Without a Name stuck. It's one of many caves across the state visitors can tour and explore.

"Caves are one of the last unexplored areas of our planet," says Marcus Gary, an adjunct professor at the University of Texas Jackson School of Geosciences. "We're still finding places where no human has been before."



INNER SPACE CAVERN

The Texas Speleological Society mapped more than 7,000 feet of this cave when it was discovered in spring 1963. 4200 S. I-35 Frontage Road, Georgetown. Tours: \$21.95 adults, \$15.95 children 4 -12. 512-931-2283; innerspacecavern.com

CAVES 101

SPELEOTHEM: a structure formed in a cave by the deposition of minerals from water, e.g. a stalactite or stalagmite

STALACTITES: a tapering structure hanging like an icicle from the roof of a cave

STALAGMITES: a mound or tapering column rising from the floor of a cave

CAVE POPCORN: small nodes of calcite, aragonite, or gypsum that form on surfaces in caves, especially limestone caves





LONGHORN CAVERN

Descend 130 feet on a 1-mile, 90-minute tour following the path of an ancient riverbed. 6211 Park Road 4 S., Burnet. Tours: \$18.95 adults, \$14.95 children 4-11. visitlonghorncavern.com



CAVERNS OF SONORA

Caverns of Sonora is hypogenic—formed by water rising from deep within the Earth. The cave includes 360 stairs and is 72 degrees but 98% humidity, so it feels like 85 degrees. *RR 1989, Caverns of Sonora Road, Sonora. Open daily except Christmas Day. Tours: \$20 adults, \$16 children 4-11. 325-387-3105; cavernsofsonora.com*

CAVERNS OF SONORA



DEVIL'S SINKHOLE

The mouth of the cave is a 50-foot-wide opening that drops 140 feet straight down into the largest chamber in Texas. Millions of Mexican free-tailed bats roost here from late spring through early fall, spiraling out of the cave each night. *Devil's Sinkhole Visitor Center, 101 N. Sweeten St., Rocksprings. Bat flight tours run Wed-Sun, May 1-Nov. 15. \$20 adults, \$11 seniors 65 and up, \$6 children 12 and under. Reservations required. 830-683-2287; tpwd.texas.gov*





THE LOW DOWN

TEXAS CAVE TRAIL includes Cave Without a Name, Caverns of Sonora, Inner Space Cavern, Longhorn Cavern State Park, and Natural Bridge Caverns. Pick up a passport at any of the caves, get it stamped at all five, and exchange it for a free T-shirt. texascavetrail.com

NATURAL BRIDGE CAVERNS

This epigenic cave created by rainwater seeping through the ground is the largest in Texas by volume and has sizeable speleothems, including flowstones, chandeliers, and soda straws.

26495 Natural Bridge Caverns Road, San Antonio. Open daily. Tours: \$24.50 and up for adults, \$16 and up children 3-11.

210-651-6101;

naturalbridgecaverns.com

DEEP AND PUNKIN CAVE

The only way into this cave—the coldest in Texas with temperatures as low as 48 degrees—is rappelling through one of two openings. Located 35 miles west of Rocksprings. Temporarily open only to Texas Cave Management Association members and guests. tcmacaves.org

FRIO BAT CAVE

This privately owned cave hosts one of the largest colonies of Mexican free-tailed bats with 10 million to 12 million.

On FM 2690 near Concan. Tours at sunset March–September. \$12 adults, \$10 children 6-11, free for children 5 and under. Reservations required. 888-502-9387; friobatflight.com



**KICKAPOO CAVERN
STATE PARK**

Kickapoo is the only cave visitors can see in its natural state—no pathways or lights, just piles of rocks and spectacular formations, including an eight-story calcite column. 20939 RR 674, Brackettville. Tours run at 1 p.m. Sat. \$10. Reservations required. 830-563-2342; tpwd.texas.gov



CAVERNS OF SONORA



UNITED WE WALK

BY KATIE OUTIERREZ
PHOTOGRAPHS BY MELANIE GRIZZEL



THE GERMAN GROUP SPORT OF VOLKSMARCHING BRINGS TEXANS TOGETHER FOR FITNESS AND CAMARADERIE



U

U.S. Army lieutenant Susan Medlin was stationed in Augsburg, Germany, in 1984, the year before the Bavarian city's 2,500th anniversary. As dry, warm winds descended from the Alps, signaling the turn to spring, Medlin knew how she would spend her Saturday mornings: traveling with a group of fellow lieutenants to traditional volksmarching events.

A volksmarch—German for “march of the people”—is a 5K, 10K, or 20K walk designed for people of all ages and fitness levels. Flexible start windows and no finish-time requirements encourage people to walk together rather than compete against one another. Volksmarching allows the group to take pleasure in a shared journey of exploration and discovery.

Medlin and her friends saw the country this way, walking in Munich, Rothenburg ob der Tauber, Stuttgart, Baden-Württemberg, and Adelsried. After each walk, there was a celebration: an oompah band, meat sizzling on a grill, and, of course, beer. Though most volksmarches were held in the warmer months, Medlin remembers driving with a friend to a winter walk on a cold December night.

“We were each given a lit torch—reeds bound and dipped in pitch, then set on fire,” Medlin recalls. “I felt very medieval tromping around in a snow-covered field with a lit torch. All we needed was a pitchfork, and we were ready to storm the castle!”

For many like Medlin, volksmarching is more than a hobby; it's a lifestyle. Veteran volksmarchers plan vacations based on states they haven't walked in. They've filled gold event record books and yellow distance record books, and they've covered T-shirts and jackets in achievement patches for events participated in and distance walked. Volksmarchers skew slightly more female than male, most are over 50,



and many are still walking well into their 70s and 80s. Even those in their 90s, who can no longer walk long distances, volunteer at checkpoints and finish tables, ready to share a coffee and a chat. For those who have been volksmarching the longest, the sport has cemented decades-long friendships, satisfied a post-retirement call to purpose, and kept them healthy and connected in a time of extreme anxiety and isolation. And it all started stateside in Texas.

“We joke that we’re America’s best kept secret,” says Medlin, now a San Antonio resident and vice-chair of the American Volkssport Association (AVA), a nonprofit headquartered in San Antonio that hosts volksmarching events throughout the country.

Volksmarching falls under the umbrella of volkssports, or “sports of the people.” These evolved from volksläufe, public running races sponsored by sports clubs in southern Germany in the early 1960s. Sports are a way of life in Germany, with nearly 90,000 sports clubs and more than 27 million members in the country today. The clubs range from grassroots organizations to professional leagues. Some of these clubs spearheaded the first volkslauf in 1963.

Initially, the races were popular. But then Olympians and other professional athletes began winning all the prizes, with more casual runners sometimes injuring themselves or even dying from heart attacks. By 1965, people were disillusioned with volksläufe. Why bother competing if there’s no chance of winning?

In 1968, 10 sports clubs from Germany, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Austria joined forces to create a sport that would emphasize camaraderie over rivalry: volksmarching. The inaugural event was a 12K mountain volksmarch departing at 7:30 a.m. from Hotel Altkonig Blich in Hohemark, Germany. According to the event brochure, the goal was to reach the top of Feldberg, the highest peak in the Black Forest. Those who finished in under 2.5 hours would receive a “tastefully designed” medal.

But the charter club members wanted to eliminate the need for finish times altogether, so they founded their own organization, the International Volkssportverband (IVV). Eventually, events expanded to include bicycling, swimming, skiing, and more—though volksmarching would remain the most popular. Today the IVV has 33 member countries, including the United States, representing thousands of clubs and millions of individual members worldwide.

Volksmarching came to the U.S. in 1976 via the Rev. Ken Knopp, a Catholic deacon in Fredericksburg. In 1975, Knopp traveled to Rome for a church meeting, then on to Germany to visit his elderly aunt and uncle, who were avid walkers. Though Knopp was only in his 40s, he struggled to keep up with them. When his aunt and uncle showed him a poster for the IVV, Knopp jotted down the organization’s contact details.

Back in Texas, Knopp wrote to the IVV president, asking



him how to host a volksmarch for the following year’s American Bicentennial celebration. As a member of the local bicentennial committee in charge of heritage, Knopp wanted to organize an event that would encourage good health and celebrate U.S. history. He also wanted to pay homage to Fredericksburg’s roots as a hub of German immigration to Texas in the 1840s.

Knopp was of German heritage, and though he’d never participated in a volksmarch, he hosted the first traditional volksmarch event in the U.S. The “Walkfest,” as it was called, featured 6- and 12-mile routes beginning at Vereins Kerche, a historical landmark in Fredericksburg’s Pioneer Plaza, and drew upward of 230 participants.

The event was a success, prompting Knopp to establish the American Volkssport Association, the IVV-sanctioned U.S. governing body of volkssports. Today, the AVA sponsors more than 200 clubs spread across almost every state, which combined host more than 2,500 volkssporting events each year. Texas alone has 29 AVA-sanctioned clubs hosting hundreds of volksmarches each year, along with special walking programs. If you know where to look, volksmarching in Texas is a culture all its own.

One of Medlin’s biggest regrets is the 20-year break she took from volksmarching after she and her husband, an Air Force officer, returned to the U.S. from Germany. In 2010, while stationed in Colorado Springs, Colorado, Medlin saw an advertisement in the paper for an April volksmarch in the



OPENING SPREAD: Susan Medlin (left) and Ellen Ott volksmarch in San Antonio. **THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT:** Ott is president of the Randolph Roadrunners; Volksmarchers take in the Del Webb community.

Gardner of the Gods, a park accented with sandstone formations. “Darren,” she said to her husband, “let’s do this.” They dug out their old distance and event record books and never looked back.

Several years later, when the Army relocated Medlin and her husband to San Antonio, she joined the Randolph Roadrunners Volkssport Club, one of a half-dozen volkssport groups in the area. Eventually, she volunteered to serve as the club’s vice president. These duties dovetail with her role at the AVA, as well as serving as president of the Texas Trail Roundup. The latter is responsible for a three-day international event that takes place in San Antonio every February.

On a Saturday morning in early December, I meet Medlin in front of St John Lutheran Church in Boerne for a traditional volksmarching event hosted by the Randolph Roadrunners. Medlin greets me wearing a sequined Santa hat, as promised. A banner strung through a low hedge reads START in bold red letters. At a traditional event, which is staffed by volunteers like Medlin, walkers can start at any time within a wide window—say from 8 a.m. to noon—if they plan to finish no later than three hours after the start window closes. Most routes take two hours to complete at a leisurely pace.

It’s 10 a.m., and despite the generous start window, most of the 80 or so walkers who have signed in so far are either finished or on the trail. Medlin ushers me inside Luther Hall, a community area where a half-dozen volunteers in green Randolph Roadrunners polo shirts make easy, friendly conversation. The air smells like remnants of the free pancake breakfast offered to event participants. Like the first volksmarches Medlin attended in Germany, many traditional events include a social component like breakfast or lunch. Lingering is encouraged, and finishers arrive through the doors flushed and exhilarated.

“Great walk,” one woman tells Ellen Ott, president of the Randolph Roadrunners, before helping herself to coffee. Ott discovered volksmarching in 1984, when she worked as a nurse in the operating room of Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Virginia. A fellow Army nurse had recently returned from Germany and talked Ott and a third nurse, Linda Goodman, into walking with her.

Volksmarching events are classified as either traditional events, such as the Boerne walk, or year-round events (YREs). Both are planned by local volkssport clubs, designed around points of interest, but YREs are not staffed. Instead, from dawn to dusk most days, walkers can find a “walk box”—usually a portable file box—at participating Starbucks, convenience stores, or parks. The box contains a registration log, a printed map, directions for the walk, and an envelope in which to mail \$3 to the local volkssport club sponsoring the YRE. Participants don’t need to be members of any volkssport

ONE STEP AT A TIME

Volksmarching consists of informal year-round events and regulated traditional events. There are too many YREs to list, but a selection of upcoming traditional events are listed below. For more information, contact the American Volkssport Association, 1008 S. Alamo St., San Antonio. 210-659-2112; ava.org

April 2 – Castroville

San Antonio Pathfinders
Castroville Regional Park,
816 Alsace Ave.
Contact: Mike Schwencke

April 9 – Richardson

Dallas Trekkers
Point North Park,
725 Synergy Park Blvd.
Contact: Deborah Carter

April 16 – Comfort

Hill Country Volkssportverein
Comfort Park, 630 SH 27.
Contact: John Bohnert

April 23 – New Braunfels

NB-Marsch-und Wandergruppe
Casa Garcia's Restaurant,
1691 SH 46.
Contact: Jan Engel

April 30 – Bastrop

Colorado River Walkers
Fisherman's Park, 1200 Willow St.
Contact: Carol Obianwu

May 14 – Hurst

Tarrant County Walkers
Chisholm Park, 2200 Norwood Drive
Contact: Brooke Hudson



club, but if they are, they can bring their distance and event record books and stamp them with the IVV certification stamp located in the walk box.

"That first walk was in a state park in Virginia," Goodman says. "It must have been a year-round event because I picture us all together but no other walkers around. It was around the fall, really gorgeous. We relaxed and talked and solved the world's problems."

Both Goodman and Ott were hooked. Goodman is now working on 35,000 kilometers and 3,000 events and has walked in every state except Hawaii.

"I have friends all over the United States and really close ones here in San Antonio who I would not have necessarily been introduced to other than meeting on walks," Goodman says.

Ott became involved with the Randolph Roadrunners in 1990, 10 years after its founding, and finally retired her distance book at 26,000 kilometers. "I was sick of keeping track," Ott says. But she maintains meticulously organized records of each event she walks. Her numerous patches are sheathed in plastic sleeves she found at Dollar Tree, ideal, she tells me, for how they open at the sides rather than the top. She's currently working on her second "A to Z Walk"—an AVA special program that includes walking in cities beginning with each letter of the alphabet.

"For Y, we went to Yoakum," Ott says. "There was only one restaurant that was open, and they ran out of barbecue because we had 100 people there trying to get their Y."

Near the double doors, Ott shows me an informational table bearing pamphlets and maps of additional AVA special programs—themed events



FROM LEFT: Ott stamps her record book; Wayne Henry lapped everyone at the Del Webb volksmarch.

that might include walking by carousels or ice cream parlors, Civil War battlegrounds or Little Free Libraries. Ott is organizing Walk Texas, a year-round event that involves walking in all seven regions of the state: Panhandle Plains, Prairies and Lakes, Piney Woods, Hill Country, Big Bend, South Texas Plains, and Gulf Coast.

In March 2020, the pandemic put a temporary pause on business as usual for volksmarchers.

“There was that initial stunned period where you were afraid to leave your house,” Medlin recalls. So, Medlin built a walk box, got it sanctioned by the AVA, and left it on her front porch for anyone who wanted to walk her neighborhood as a YRE. She walked her own route 100 times that summer, but the day she made it a featured walk for the club, 40 to 50 people arrived on her doorstep.

“We couldn’t stand to not see each other,” Medlin says.

After six weeks of isolation, volksmarchers began cautiously walking together again. Turns out volksmarching might be the ideal pandemic pastime. Walking has profound health benefits, from improving mood and cognition to preventing or managing heart disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes. A study published on nature.com in June 2021 used mobility data from mobile devices as well as area-level data to examine the walking patterns of 1.62 million users across 10 major U.S. cities before and after 2020 lockdowns. The results showed utilitarian walks (to work, for example) decreased, while recreational walks (Sunday afternoon strolls) increased, at least in higher-income areas. One of the study’s conclusions

is that equal opportunities to support walking are needed in lower-income areas. Also, a survey from the shoe brand Rockport found 53% of Americans are walking 1 to 5 miles more each day than before the pandemic.

“An active walker is a healthier person,” Medlin says.

Pat Gunter began volksmarching in 1985 as part of her Weight Watchers journey. “They told me I needed to do 300 calories of exercise every day in order to maintain any kind of weight loss,” she says. “Well, I’m 83, and I’m still walking. I have friends who are 85 and 87, and they’re still walking. It’s good for all ages.”

After Ott talks me into becoming a member of the Randolph Roadrunners, I pay \$5 for my new walker packet, containing my first record books and coupons for free IVV credit at three events. I fill in my start card and then Gunter hands me written directions for the 5K and 10K routes. I’m on my way.

Once my visit inside Luther Hall ends, I’m leaving at the tail end of the start window and therefore on my own for this walk. Not so a month later when I set out for my second traditional volksmarch event, which starts at Corner Bakery at the Quarry Market in San Antonio.

On a rainy January morning, I join a group of friends who regularly volksmarch together: Sandra Bliss, Thomas Frankhouser, Denise Wanke, Laura Krbec, and Wendy Dylia. Bliss began volksmarching in 2018 with a friend who’d grown up volksmarching in Germany as a little girl. Bliss regularly posts photos of her walks to social media, which intrigued the other women, who knew each other as school parents. Over time, Bliss introduced the sport to Frankhouser and soon they began dating. It poured on the walk, but Frankhouser didn’t complain. “That’s how I knew he could hang with me,” Bliss says with a laugh. Eventually, the group went from friendly acquaintances to real friends who’d one day like to travel together to Germany, where it all began.

Because of the weather, the turnout is small—only 69 walkers. Normally, traditional volksmarches attract 80 to 100 people, though in the 1970s it was common to get as many as 600. The third annual Fredericksburg volksmarch in 1978 drew almost 1,500 participants, including Lady Bird Johnson.

Though I’d only planned to walk a 5K, I’m enjoying the camaraderie too much to turn around at the checkpoint. We push forward toward 10K, passing the mist-shrouded St. Anthony de Padua Catholic Church and winding through the architecturally diverse neighborhoods. We talk about everything from the impact of the pandemic on schools to the impact of pregnancy on our bodies.

We arrive back at Corner Bakery grinning and slightly breathless. Bliss smiles contentedly and says, “It’s walking therapy.”

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PLATES



CHICHARRÓN DE
Pulpo Picosito
at Seareinas in
Austin.



THE MANGONADA is among the original cocktails Gabriela Bucio concocts.

“Pink,” everyone intoned. “Everything is pink.” Pink drinks, pink napkins, even pink tortillas. Pink, pink, pink. But no one really captured the atmosphere and experience of going to a restaurant created by Gabriela Bucio, an Austin entrepreneur whose mini empire of local eateries has thrived during the pandemic. No one told me the pink wasn’t obnoxious. No one told me to look out for the sly humor evident in neon signs proclaiming TACO DIRTY TO ME or DAME MÁS CAFEÍNA (a reference to the Daddy Yankee song “Gasolina”). No one told me I’d love the music so much I’d want to either dance or throw *gritos*.

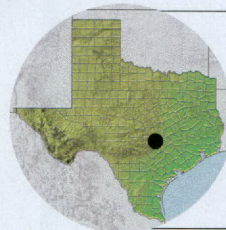
“I describe it as ‘Mexillennial,’” Bucio said of her décor’s distinctive personality and vibrant aesthetic. “It’s modern. It’s what young Latinos are into.”

My first experience with a Bucio restaurant was Gabriela’s at Southpark Meadows in South Austin, which focuses on Michoacán-inspired dishes. Of course, there was the ubiquitous pink, but it was balanced with a soft turquoise and the palms, ivies, monstera plants, and fiddle-leaf figs I’d come to see at Bucio’s other places. White and purple Christmas lights twinkled in century-old oak trees, brightening the generous outdoor seating area. Flat-screens displaying sports vied with speakers playing a blend of new and old conjunto and banda music. On the drink menu: Bad Bunny kiwi margaritas, peach Moscow mules, and piña loca Jarritos with Alto tequila, lime, pineapple, and agave. On the food menu: fish ceviche, shrimp quesadillas, and *huaraches*—blue corn masa cups filled with steak, queso asado, and pico de gallo.

Pinkalicious

Gabriela Bucio’s chain of restaurants and clubs celebrates ‘Mexillennial’ culture in Austin

By ire’ne lara silva



GABRIELA’S GROUP
Austin establishments include Gabriela’s, Taquero Mucho, Seareinas, Mala Vida, Mala Santa, and Revival Coffee. gabrielasgroup.com

“I was drawn first to the pink. Yes, it’s feminine, but it’s also fierce, and I love it.”

Groups of diners, mostly in their 20s and 30s, were taking selfies in the highly Instagram-able space featuring novelty wallpaper and stacks of play money. I’d see this again at other locations—Bucio’s Taquero Mucho, a hip taquería downtown that boasts a flower-festooned telephone booth in the back patio, where I witnessed four young friends cramming themselves in for a quick photo. Bucio’s favorite color is everywhere.

“I was drawn first to the pink,” said Vanessa Salinas, who attended the soft opening of a second Taquero Mucho location, at The Domain in North Austin, in February. “Yes, it’s feminine, but it’s also fierce, and I love it.”

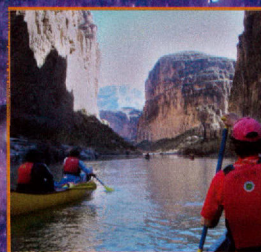
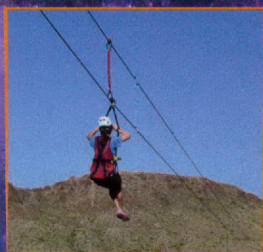
We’re used to seeing Mexican restaurants with atmospheres that are Cinco de Mayo festive, family friendly, bare bones, or upscale. We’re used to an ambiance that’s neutral in color, all off-whites, beiges, browns, or grays. So, it’s a pleasant shock to see someone confidently offering their own distinctive take—and it’s resonating with the Latinx crowd.

“I’ve always said I am my followers,” Bucio said. “I don’t want to have to go to the outskirts of Austin. I want to Uber downtown. And I want to bar hop and go to other clubs. That option didn’t exist before. We wanted to bring banda [a genre of Mexican music featuring brass instruments], bring our culture, to the historic Sixth Street District.”

Born in Michoacán, Mexico, Bucio moved with her family to McAllen when she was 5. She spent her childhood and teens alternating between McAllen and Austin before settling in the capital city. Employed as a family law paralegal, Bucio started bartending nights at an Austin Tex-Mex restaurant to make extra cash. It wasn’t long before she and her brother

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Arturo Bucio, who was running kitchens at the time, quit their jobs to chase their dream. “We just thought we could be doing a lot better for ourselves,” Bucio said. In February 2018, they scraped together every penny they had and poured it into their first restaurant, Gabriela’s in downtown Austin, serving modern Mexican cuisine.

Their success has been a family affair. Gabriela and Arturo co-own Gabriela’s Group; their brother, Salvador Bucio, is a regional manager; and their mother, Maria Elena Bucio, assists with development of new dishes and quality control. In less than four years, Gabriela’s Group has opened five restaurants (two Gabriela’s, two Taquero Muchos, and seafood and sushi spot Seareinas), as well as two live music venues (Mala Vida and Mala Santa) and Revival Coffee. All are in Austin, but there are plans for expansion into Houston this spring.

“Gabriela’s unique story serves as an indicator of what the future looks like: diverse, female-led, exciting, impactful, but considerate of the backs upon

which our paths to success have been established,” said Brittney S. Rodriguez, Interim CEO & COO of the Greater Austin Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

In 2020, Bucio reopened the old Revival Coffee on Seventh Street, where she used to stop most afternoons for a latte. At the new Revival, customers will find the soul-sustaining *abuelita* latte—Mexican hot chocolate with a shot of espresso—and a deep rose-pink concha that’s unusually soft and dense with a topping that tastes like cinnamon-flavored gum. Bucio’s love of pink is on full display at the café. It took me a minute to see the tongue-in-cheek message on a wide expanse of pink that read, “This wall intentionally left pink.”

Bucio’s feminine imagery is meticulously cultivated. She’s especially proud of the logo for Seareinas. “When you think of a seafood restaurant,” Bucio said, “the logo is always a captain or a sailor or a pirate. For us it’s a mermaid. She’s the queen of the sea, so it is very feminine. All my businesses are female friendly, so a lot of people want to come. Once the women make something cool, then everybody



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Mal Verde sushi roll at Seareinas; Bad Bunny cookies at Revival Coffee; Gabriela’s at Southpark Meadows.



“Gabriela’s unique story serves as an indicator of what the future looks like: diverse, female-led, exciting, impactful.”

wants to be there.”

I admitted to Bucio I love the wordplay in the names of her businesses. Change one vowel sound in the name of Taquero Mucho and you get *te quiero mucho*, or “I love you very much.” At its most innocent, Mala Vida can be interpreted as a “life of drinking, dancing, and flirting.” Mala Santa translates to “Bad Woman/Saintly Woman,” and the venue’s sign features devilish and angelic imagery. Seareinas is both a play on *sirena*, meaning mermaid, and a bilingual version of “queen of the sea.”

Later, on the back patio of Taquero Mucho downtown, amid *papel picado* (decorative cut paper), strings of lights, and big pink and silver ball-shaped ornaments, I enjoyed carnitas that nearly reduced me to tears. A simple-seeming plate of shredded pork, rice, charro beans, green salsa, and pico de gallo felt like a long-lost meal with the tastes of my mother’s South Texas kitchen. I was surprised to find the freshly made corn tortillas were pink. I’ve had white corn tortillas, yellow corn tortillas, blue corn tortillas—I think I’ve even had green—but I’ve never seen corn tortillas come in such a deep rose pink. I wrapped my taquitos of carnitas tenderly and closed my eyes to make sure I didn’t miss a single moment.

“Gabi and her family being Mexican—they want to give a little bit of their home to people who come in,” said Abel Ibarra, a former manager at Taquero Mucho. Ibarra told me he loves the idea of Mexillennial. “Millennials are in tune with technology, but we’re also into the next generation, Generation Z. People come here and connect to the food and connect to the music. It’s very beautiful and empowering.”

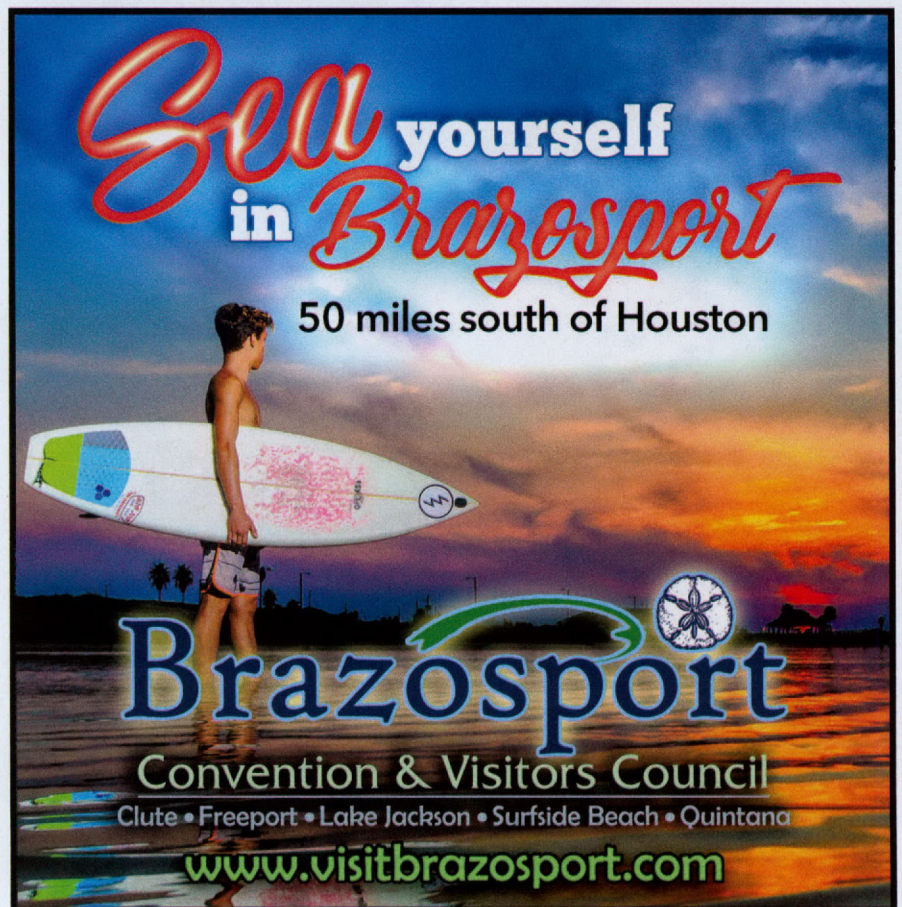


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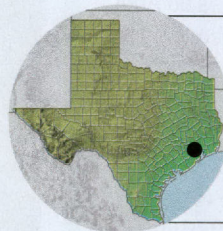


THE CHICKEN AND matzo ball soup at Kenny and Ziggy's exemplifies the deli's bigger-is-better approach.

Lots o' Matzo

Ziggy Gruber shares his recipe for chicken matzo ball soup

By Steven Craig Lindsey



**KENNY AND ZIGGY'S
NEW YORK DELICATESSEN
RESTAURANT**
1743 Post Oak Blvd., Houston.
713-871-8883;
Mon-Sun 8 a.m.-9 p.m.
kennyandziggy.com

From towering house-cured corned beef sandwiches to filling bowls of chicken soup, every morsel of food served at Kenny and Ziggy's New York Delicatessen Restaurant is infused with a nearly 100-year history. The origins of the Houston restaurant date to 1927, when Max Gruber and his brothers-in-law opened The Rialto Deli, the first Jewish deli on Broadway in New York City (It shuttered in 1956). Since then, Gruber's descendants have opened independent delis across the U.S.

"A lot of items on our menu are the exact recipes that my grandfather created or got from his family and were served at The Rialto," says Ziggy Gruber, the third-generation deli maven who opened Kenny and Ziggy's—named for himself and a former business partner—in Houston's Galleria neighborhood in 1999. "My grandfather taught me everything he knew, from curing meat to preparing all kinds of dishes, so he was instrumental in putting his thumbprint on me to keep the family traditions alive."

Before arriving in Texas, Gruber worked at his family's New York shop, opened a deli in West Hollywood, and studied at London's Le Cordon Bleu. Though Gruber had no previous ties to Houston, local businessman Lenny Friedman reached out to his friend Fred Klein to help convince Gruber a Texas deli would be a success.

"When Freddy mentioned opening in Houston, I said, 'Are they going to know what my kind of food is?'" Gruber recalls. "I thought it was going to be like some cow town with horses everywhere, but it was so modern and so vibrant. They wanted me to be successful and really encouraged me."

The menu features New York-style deli classics—chopped liver, lox, bagels,

"If someone left here hungry, I would never sleep at night."

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FROM TOP: The walls of Kenny and Ziggy's showcase celebrities; Ziggy Gruber founded the Houston deli.

monstrous sandwiches, Hungarian stuffed cabbage, and, of course, cheesecake—plus a full bar and an old-school soda fountain.

Every wall of the restaurant is plastered with caricatures of celebrities, Broadway and movie posters—including one for the 2014 documentary *Deli Man* in which Gruber appeared—and photographs of Gruber with various VIPs. The deli moved from its original location down the street in February, and the décor is both a nod to New York delis and a familiar sight to patrons of his original location. Everything is served in massive portions, which appeals to the everything's-bigger-in-Texas crowd.

"If someone left here hungry," Gruber says, "I would never sleep at night." 🍴



RECIPE

Kenny and Ziggy's Chicken Matzo Ball Soup

Serves 6-8

The food served during the eight-day celebration of Passover, which starts on April 15 this year, has deep symbolism. Matzo, for example, represents the unleavened bread Israelites ate as they fled Egypt. But this recipe from executive chef Ziggy Gruber makes for a nourishing delight that can be enjoyed any time of year.

CHICKEN SOUP INGREDIENTS

- 1 whole chicken
- 3 stalks celery
- 1 large onion, unpeeled
- 2 large carrots, peeled
- Kosher salt to taste
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- 1 bunch dill, cleaned & tied with a string
- 1 bunch parsley, cleaned & tied with a string

DIRECTIONS

1. Place ingredients in a pot; cover with water.
2. Let simmer for 75 minutes.
3. Remove chicken. When chicken cools, cut into bite-size pieces. Set aside.
4. Strain the soup, and discard everything solid except for the carrots and celery.
5. Add salt and pepper to taste. Slice carrots and celery and toss into soup. Add the matzo balls and chicken pieces if desired.



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MATZO BALLS INGREDIENTS

4 large eggs

1/3 cup schmaltz (rendered
chicken fat)

1/4 teaspoon plus 1 tablespoon salt

1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black
or, even better, white pepper

1 1/3 cups matzo meal

DIRECTIONS

1. Crack eggs into large bowl and beat with fork to mix thoroughly. Beat in the schmaltz, add 1/4 teaspoon salt and pepper.

2. Stir in matzo meal, then mix vigorously with a wooden spoon until completely blended and very stiff.

3. Let stand for 30 minutes. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until ready to use (up to 8 hours).

Fill a large, wide pot 3/4 full with water. Add remaining salt. Bring to boil over high heat.

4. Wet your hands with cold water so the batter doesn't stick. Hold and roll the mixture between your palms. Shape into balls about 1 1/4 inches in diameter. They will double in size when cooked.

5. Gently place matzo balls in the boiling water. Decrease the heat so the water simmers briskly, but isn't at a rolling boil, when the pot is covered. Cook for 25 minutes without removing the pot lid.

6. Remove cooked matzo balls with a slotted spoon and add to chicken soup.

To purchase tickets or for more information visit Bush41.org

This program is made possible in part through hotel tax revenue funded from the City of College Station and the City of Bryan through the Arts Council of Brazos Valley.



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April 22 – May 1

Hunt County Festival
of the Arts
May 6 – 7

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TEXAS



MISSION CONTROL at the Manned Spacecraft Center directed Apollo 11 astronauts during the 1969 moon landing.

Shoot for the Moon

How NASA and the Space Race of the 1960s shaped Houston

By Anthony Head

Sixty years ago this April, NASA broke ground near Clear Lake to construct a new command post for manned space exploration. Located 25 miles south of Houston on the Gulf Coast, the Manned Spacecraft Center's most pressing mission was to accomplish President John Kennedy's audacious goal to send a man to the moon and return him safely.

The project was part of the 1960s Space Race, a Cold War showdown between the United States and the Soviet Union. Along with demonstrating who had the mightiest rocket power and superior technology, it could also tip the balance of military power toward one country or the other. Space—and spe-

cifically the moon—was a major front in the simmering conflict between the two adversaries. Thanks to NASA, Texas was on the front lines.

The 1,620-acre Clear Lake site was ideal for NASA because of its year-round temperate climate, access to large waterways, and proximity to Rice University and University of Houston; plus, Ellington Air Force Base was nearby. It would take two years to build the campus—renamed the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center in 1973—but the clock was ticking on Kennedy's moon challenge. Houston proved to be the logical choice for temporary workspaces. To jump-start the process, NASA took what it could get—warehouses, office space, even apart-

ment buildings. In return, during this brief but intense period of relocation, Houston embraced the space program, even branding itself "Space City."

"Kennedy was a master salesman for space," says Douglas Brinkley, history professor at Rice and author of the 2019 book *American Moonshot: John F. Kennedy and the Great Space Race*. "He was able to sell going to the moon as a way to turn the South into a technological zone, and the greatest beneficiary was Houston. Today, the word 'Houston' is synonymous with 'mission accomplished.'"

In March 1962, Robert Gilruth, the Manned Spacecraft Center director, opened a provisional headquarters inside the Farnsworth & Chambers Building,

now home to the Houston Parks and Recreation Department. NASA employees also leased space for offices and labs at places such as the Gulfgate Shopping City (later demolished) and a Canada Dry bottling plant (now a carpet store). An apartment building on Beatty Street, in the southeast part of town, housed the agency's Technical Information Division.

Houston's population already exceeded 1 million people when NASA arrived, but the roughly 3,000-plus employees who eventually moved to the area were influential beyond their numbers. While Texans filled some positions, the country's sharpest minds in space technology converged on Houston for jobs like flight controller and aeronautical engineer. There were also clerical staff, administrators, and mathematicians known as "computers," mostly women who hand-calculated vital, complex equations for each mission.

Houstonians welcomed the new arrivals with open arms and pocketbooks.

"People wanted to be involved with NASA," says Jennifer M. Ross-Nazzal, historian with Johnson Space Center. "Companies offered office space, Joske's offered drapes for offices, Continental provided receptionists. They were offered cars—and we're talking procurement people, not astronauts, not even engineers—just the advance people charged with setting up the site."

Jerry Bostick, who moved to Houston in 1962 to work for NASA as a retrofire officer and flight dynamics officer, says department stores freely handed out credit cards to the new arrivals. "They had welcoming parties almost every

"Kennedy was able to sell going to the moon as a way to turn the South into a technological zone, and the greatest beneficiary was Houston."

Photo: Courtesy NASA

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SCAN ME



AN AIRCRAFT transports Spacer Shuttle Endeavor with Clear Lake in the background; a NASA worker packs a model rocket in a converted bottling plant.



Eagle Landing

Not an astronaut or aerospace engineer? It's still possible to see the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center by exploring Space Center Houston, the visitor center. Along with history and technical exhibits and educational films, the center offers tram rides to the campus. The "Mission Control" tour visits the meticulously rebuilt Mission Control room from 1969, where visitors watch footage of the first moon landing and hear the timeless audio clip that includes, "Houston, Tranquility Base here. The Eagle has landed." 1601 NASA Parkway, Houston. 281-244-2100; spacecenter.org

week in places like the Shamrock Hilton [demolished in 1987], Glenn McCarthy's Cork Club [now closed], some at the Music Hall [now a performing arts space]."

The Houston Homebuilders Association even offered the first astronauts free houses worth \$24,000, according to a 1962 *United Press International* article, but NASA deemed that a bit much.

Still, Houston's 1962 Fourth of July parade and barbecue thrown for NASA employees was a hit. When President Kennedy visited Rice University that September, declaring the U.S. must be "the world's leading space-faring nation," he appealed to Texans' sense of pride to get the job done. When Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas 13 months later, Lyndon Johnson, a Texan from Johnson City, became president. He bolstered the administration's commitment to the Space Race, declaring: "I do not believe that this generation of Americans is willing to resign itself to going to bed each night by the light of a communist moon."

The idea of exploring the moon was kicked around during President Dwight Eisenhower's administration in the 1950s, though Eisenhower feared the moon

would become a nuclear-missile launch-pad. But after the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, Earth's first artificial satellite, in October 1957, the U.S. pivoted toward making a moon landing a reality.

Beeping its way across low-Earth orbit, Sputnik fascinated and frightened Americans. Biographer Robert Caro described then-Sen. Johnson as feeling "uneasy and apprehensive" as he tried in vain from his Hill Country ranch to spot the sphere cruising the sky over Texas. It didn't ease Johnson's mind when the Soviets tested a hydrogen bomb two days later. He held hearings about space and missile activities, chaired the Special Committee on Space and Aeronautics, and urged Eisenhower to sign the National Aeronautics and Space Act into law, establishing NASA. Under Kennedy, Johnson headed the National Aeronautics and Space Council. In April 1961—the same month Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first human to orbit Earth—Johnson recommended to his boss that America shoot for the moon.

The federal government considered 23 sites for a new Manned Spacecraft Center, but there was no real contest. In Clear Lake's corner stood Vice President Johnson, Speaker of the House Sam

Rayburn, of Bonham, and Texas congressmen Bob Casey and Olin Teague. Albert Thomas, who was chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee with responsibility for funding NASA, also pressed the case. On Sept. 19, 1961, NASA announced Clear Lake would become its new headquarters.

By 1964, NASA employees were leaving Houston for Clear Lake. Laboratories, test facilities, and simulators were operating at the center while new shopping malls, restaurants, and schools transformed nearby communities like Clear Lake City, Friendswood, and Timber Cove.

"We bought a house in June 1964 in Nassau Bay, right across from the entrance to MSC," recalls Gerry Griffin, a former NASA flight director. "I think we were the sixth family in that development. It didn't take long to fill up the area."

Griffin retired in 1986 as director of the Johnson Space Center and became president and CEO of the Greater Houston Chamber of Commerce. He speculates Houston's excitement waned after NASA employees left the city for Clear Lake. Houstonians didn't run into astronauts or engineers much anymore. "The Spacecraft Center didn't get a lot of attention because it mystified some of the people," Griffin says.

According to a Stanford Research Institute report published a year before the moon landing, the Clear Lake region saw growth in population, economy, and education as the Manned Spacecraft Center took root. The report even stated that Houston, which annexed the spacecraft center land in 1977, experienced a "dramatic change in character" because of its "pride in being a space center."

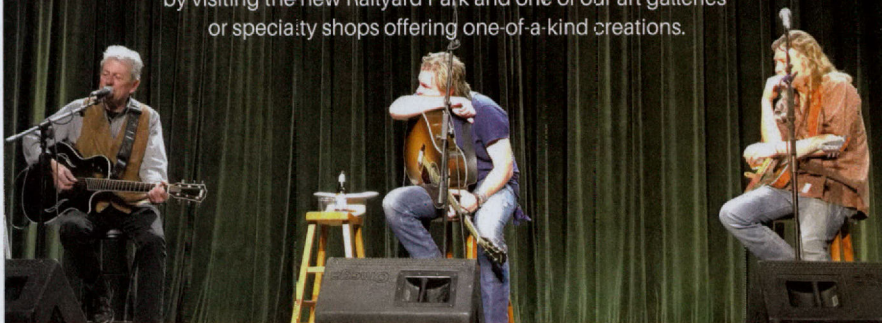
Apollo 11 underscored the sentiment. On July 20, 1969, the mission reached the moon's surface, and four days later returned its crew—Neil Armstrong, Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin, and Michael Collins—safely to Earth. Kennedy's challenge was met. The Space Race was won.

More than 50 years later, Houston still proudly calls itself "Space City." 🚀

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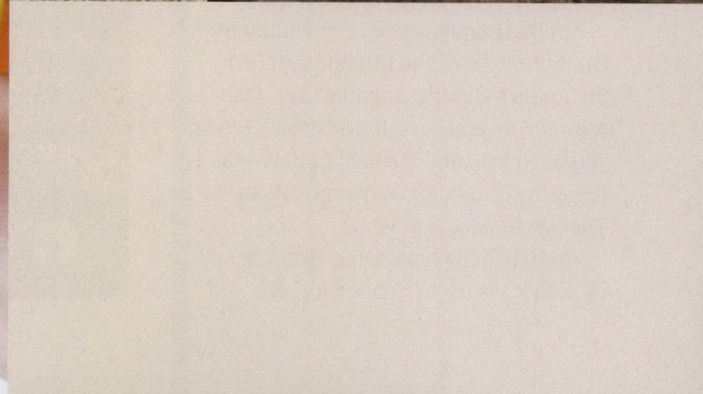
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EVENTS



En Plein Sight

Plein-air artists take to the Hill Country for a week of lakeside painting

Every spring, plein-air artists from across the country head to Marble Falls for Paint the Town, a weeklong celebration of open-air painting in the Hill Country. This year's event, which runs April 24-30, features exhibits, gallery sales, live demonstrations, a judged artist competition, and a student competition. Thousands of spectators will watch the 37 artists paint scenes in a variety of signature styles during the 15th annual event. "They can pick anywhere along Lake LBJ and in the area to paint," says Erin Hinzmann, Paint the Town co-chair. "They go up on Main Street, along the lake, all over town, really."

Monday is Free Paint Day, where artists choose a spot along Lake LBJ and paint a scene of their choosing, and Wednesday is Student Art Day at Lakeside Pavilion on Lake Marble Falls, where 8th-12th graders paint with the artists on Main Street. The gallery, where artists display and sell their paintings, opens Thursday and runs for the rest of the week. On Friday night, the winners are announced, and winning paintings are auctioned off. This year's judge is nationally recognized art collector Tim Newton.

In Saturday's Quick Draw challenge, student and professional artists have 80 minutes to paint a scene of their choice within a mapped area of Marble Falls. "Typically, they use an air horn to let painters know it's time to start," Hinzmann says, "but last year, we had a patron bring in a 1950s police car that we drove through the streets to alert painters that their 80 minutes was starting. I'm hoping we do that again this year." —Amanda Ogle

Paint the Town

April 24-30
Lakeside Pavilion,
305 Buena Vista
hlicarts.com/ptt-2022-event

BIG BEND COUNTRY

ALPINE

Alpine Gem and Mineral Show

April 15-17

For 31 years, the show has featured spectacular gemstone specimens, jewelry, and artwork, plus door prizes and demonstrations. Alpine Civic Center, 801 W. Holland Ave. 432-244-9503; facebook.com/chihuahuan-desert-gem-mineral-club-300125913343720

FORT DAVIS

Dark Skies Festival

April 29-30

The inaugural festival celebrates the night sky and features daytime and evening activities, tours of facilities, telescope viewing, educational activities, guest speakers, food, and live music. A new exhibit on protecting dark skies, funded by Apache Corporation, debuts at the Frank N. Bash Visitors Center. Admission to daytime programs and events is free, and reservations are required for evening programs. McDonald Observatory, 3640 Dark Sky Drive. 512-475-6763; mcdonaldobservatory.org

GULF COAST

ALVIN

Alvin Rotary Frontier Day

April 28-30

The 48th annual Frontier Day features a parade, two shootouts by the Alvin Rotary Club Gunfighters, children's rides, food concessions, carnival activities, vendors, and an antique car and bike show. Proceeds support scholarships and other charities in the Alvin area. National Oak Park, 118 S. Magnolia St. 713-828-9477; alvinrotary.org

CORPUS CHRISTI

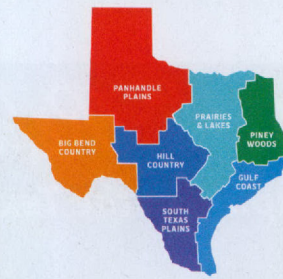
Birdiest Festival in America

April 20-24

The festival highlights one of the country's busiest flyways. Events include guided birding field trips to regional birding hot spots, shorebird/wading bird sites, and private ranches; "The Raptor Project" presentations; a vendor trade show; and an artisan show. Birder,

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author, and illustrator David Sibley shares insights on migration. Last year, 289 bird species were documented. *South Texas Botanical Gardens and Nature Center*, 8545 S. Staples St. 361-852-2100; birdifestival.org

FREEPORT

Riverfest

April 29-30

This event has a barbecue cookoff, crawfish cookoff, vendor market, and nightly live entertainment. *Freeport Municipal Park*, 421 N. Brazosport Blvd. 979-233-6061; freeport.tx.us

GALVESTON

FeatherFest and Nature Photo Festival

April 21-24

One of the largest birding festivals in Texas, the 20th annual festival includes field trips, workshops, and social events for nature enthusiasts. *Various locations*. galvestonfeatherfest.com

GALVESTON

The Grand Kids Festival

April 30

This annual festival for all ages features live entertainment, arts and crafts, a storytelling tent, more than a dozen activity areas, over 40 activity booths, a variety of food and beverage booths, and the opportunity to create a hands-on masterpiece. *Postoffice Street, between 20th and 23rd streets*. 409-765-1894; thegrand.com

PORT ARANSAS

Texas SandFest

April 8-10

Enjoy the Gulf Coast as you stroll amid feats of art and architecture. Master sculptors from all over the world head to Port Aransas to craft sand sculptures of all kinds, such as Abraham Lincoln, the Alamo, and the Statue of Liberty. *Port Aransas Beach, Markers 8-18*. 361-749-5919; texassandfest.org

PORT ARTHUR

Cajun Heritage Festival

April 2-3

Tune in to Cajun culture with real Cajun music, dancing, food, and fun. Past festivals have had Cajun waltz contests, crawfish races, crawfish

eating contests, and two-step contests. *Carl A. Parker Multipurpose Center*, 1800 Lakeshore Drive. 409-835-2787; cajunheritagefest.com

ROCKPORT

Kite Festival

April 30-May 1

Free and open to the public, the festival features professional kite-flying demonstrations, kite boarders in the ski basin, food vendors, and music. *Aransas County Navigation District Festival Grounds*, 110 Seabreeze Drive. 361-729-6445; rockportculturalartsdistrict.com

SURFSIDE BEACH

Old Guys Surf Reunion

April 30

Join Texas surfers as they remember and honor those who have gone before them. The event includes vendors, food trucks, a paddle out, and a nighttime bonfire. *Stahlman Park*, 2211 Bluewater Highway. 979-233-1531; surfsidetx.org

HILL COUNTRY

AUSTIN

Cap 10K

April 10

Established in 1978, the Statesman Cap 10K is the largest 10K in Texas and sixth largest in the country. *Downtown Austin*, 305 S. Congress Ave. 512-445-3598; cap10k.com

AUSTIN

Fusebox Festival

April 13-17

Hundreds of local, national, and international artists across all disciplines converge for Fusebox, a hybrid arts festival that champions adventurous works in theater, dance, film, music, literature, and visual and culinary arts. *Various locations*. 512-574-0046; fuseboxfestival.com

AUSTIN

Reggae Fest

April 22-24

A fundraiser for the Capital Area Food Bank, Reggae Fest features three days of reggae, world, and dub talent, and more than 50 vendors selling food and arts

and crafts. *Auditorium Shores*, 900 W. Riverside Drive. austinreggaefest.com

BANDERA

Buck Wild Rough Stock Rodeo

April 23

Events at this rough stock rodeo include mutton busting, mini broncs, cash scramble, mini bull riding, open bull riding, saddle bronc, and bareback. *Mansfield Park*, 2886 SH 16 N. 830-796-3045; banderacowboycapital.com

BURNET

Bluebonnet Festival

April 8-10

Bluebonnet season begins with a grand parade, carnival, and two stages with live music. The festivities include a pet parade, wiener dog races, 5K and 10K runs, a car show, a demolition derby, children's activities, a children's bicycle decorating contest, over 150 arts and crafts vendors, a biergarten, and a food court. *Burnet Historic Square*. 512-756-4297; bluebonnetfestival.org

FREDERICKSBURG

Texas Vintage Motorcycle

Fandango

April 1-3

The vintage swap meet, vintage bike show, and series of vintage races offer entertainment for everyone, whether a vintage motorcycle enthusiast or novice. *Gillespie County Fairgrounds*, 530 Fair Drive. thetexasfandango.com

FREDERICKSBURG

Luckenbach Bluegrass Festival

April 23

Spend the day enjoying bluegrass music, food, and a family-friendly atmosphere. The bluegrass music starts at 1 p.m. *Luckenbach Texas*, 412 Luckenbach Town Loop. luckenbachtexas.com

FREDERICKSBURG

Wildflower 5K/10K Run and Walk and Children's Fun Run

April 23

Follow a scenic course in and around Fredericksburg and enjoy the spring weather and wildflowers along the way. *Marktplatz*,

100 block of West Main Street. hillcountrymemorial.org

GEORGETOWN

Red Poppy Festival

April 22-24

The "Red Poppy Capital of Texas" celebrates this annual event in honor of red poppy season. The three-day celebration includes food vendors, live music, a parade and car show, kids' Fun Zone, a 5K, an artisan market, and fields of red poppies. *Downtown Georgetown*. 800-436-8696; poppy.georgetown.org

LLANO

Fiddle Fest

April 1-3

To capture and maintain the musical tradition, Fiddle Fest is full of music and stories that tell us about our past. The fiddle competition has youth, senior, open, and accompanist divisions, and Saturday brings an evening concert. The competition is free to attend. *John L. Kuykendall Event Center and Arena*, 2200 Ranch Road 152. 325-247-5354; llanofiddlefest.com

LLANO

Llano Crawfish Open

April 22-23

Celebrate crawfish season with great food, arts and crafts, the Crawfish Crawler 5K Walk and Run, auctions, steer roping, live music, a motorcycle fun run, and a golf tournament. The event benefits Llano charities. *Robinson City Park*, 100 Robinson Drive. 325-247-2270; llanocrawfishopen.com

NEW BRAUNFELS

Folkfest

April 9-10

Costumed interpreters demonstrate life in early Texas. Learn brick-making, candle-making, clothes-washing, and quilt-making through demonstrations. There are also reenactments, pioneer craft demonstrations, free furniture museum tours, and musical entertainment. *Museum of Texas Handmade Furniture*, 1370 Church Hill Drive. 830-629-6504; texashandmadeurniture.com/folkfest



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NEW BRAUNFELS

Train Show

April 9-10

The show displays traveling model railroads and features more than 60 vendors from Texas and out of state for buying, selling, or swapping. There are hourly drawings for prizes; a silent auction; a mini food court; and a "Kids Run the Trains" layout. *New Braunfels Civic Center, 375 S. Castell Ave. 830-627-2447; nbrrm.org*

PANHANDLE PLAINS

COLEMAN

Great Western Trail Days

April 22-24

In the late 1800s, the Great Western Trail started in Mexico and ended in Canada, snaking through Central Texas, making it the longest cattle trail in the world. Events include a registered Longhorn show, ranch horse events, a pioneer market, and educational activities. *Various locations, 13152 SH 206. 325-669-2292; greatwesterntraildays.com*

NEWCASTLE

Crawfish and Cannons

April 9

Historic Fort Belknap hosts its sixth annual event featuring a crawfish boil, live cannon fire, children's activities, vendors, armadillo races, and live music. The Goodnight Loving 5K, 10K, and half marathon takes place in the morning. *Fort Belknap, 114 Fort Circle. 940-549-0401; goodnightlovingrun.com*

PINEY WOODS

GLADEWATER

East Texas Gusher Days

April 15-16

The event includes arts and crafts, food vendors, and live music from the band Noonday. On Saturday, there's a chili cookoff, antique car show, and music from the Darrin Morris Band. *Downtown Gladewater Historic District, 215 N. Main St. 903-845-5501; gusher-days.com*

HUNTSVILLE

Rosenwald Earth Day Festival

April 22

The Rosenwald School was a rural school for Black children in the Jim Crow South. Commemorate the Rosenwald School grounds, founders, caregivers, and alumni at this centennial celebration. Live music rounds out the day.

Rosenwald School Acres, 639
Rosenwall Road. 832-598-7469;
rosenwaldacres.com

JEFFERSON

Outlaw Nationals Car Show

April 15-16

This antique rod show includes karaoke on Friday night, live entertainment and a live auction on Saturday night, and awards. *Downtown Jefferson.* outlawnationals.com

JEFFERSON

Battle of Big Cypress Bayou Reenactment

April 29-May 1

Experience a full-scale reenactment of the Battle on the Big Cypress Bayou, complete with infantry, cavalry, and artillery. There are three different battle reenactments over the three days, along with a downtown skirmish on Saturday morning. *Downtown Jefferson, 601 S. Polk St. 903-733-1035; battleforjefferson.com*

MAGNOLIA

Spring Fest Market

April 2

More than 70 vendors take part in a spring-themed market. Pictures with the Easter Bunny are available, and kids can enjoy face painting, egg hunting, and crafts. *Magnolia Event Center, 11659 FM 1488. 281-356-1488; greatermagnoliaparkwaycc.org/spring-fest-market-2021*

NACOGDOCHES

Do Dat Barbecue Cookoff

April 30

Enjoy samples from more than 30 teams cooking their best barbecue. Vendors sell refreshments and other goods. *Nacogdoches County Exposition and Civic Center, 3805 NW Stallings Drive. facebook.com/events/924245554800449*

PALESTINE

1836 Chuckwagon Races at the Diamond B Ranch

April 22-24

This event has multiple divisions of wagon races, a cowboy-style match race, pasture roping, barrel racing, and a mounted shooting competition. Bring your horses, mules, and wagons and compete, or just sit back and watch.

Diamond B Ranch, 11589 FM 321. 903-721-9111;

1836chuckwagonrace.com

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www.terrelljubilee.com
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FREE EVENTS GUIDE

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PRAIRIES AND LAKES

CORSICANA

Mrs. Texas Pageant

April 28-30

Events include a fitness competition, private interview, and an evening gown contest. This pageant is the only official state qualifier to Mrs. America and Mrs. World. The Palace Theatre, 112 W. Sixth Ave. 214-785-9717; mrstexas.net

DALLAS

Deep Ellum Arts Festival

April 1-3

More than 200 visual artists sell and commission original works, and 100 bands and performing artists provide entertainment from multiple stages and performance areas. Deep Ellum. 214-855-1888; deepellumartsfestival.com

FORT WORTH

Main Street Fort Worth Arts Festival

April 7-10

The 35th festival spans more than 27 blocks and features 220 artists from across the U.S. as well as entertainers, authentic Texas cuisine, and arts and crafts activities. Downtown Fort Worth. 817-336-2787; mainstreetartsfest.org

GRAND PRAIRIE

Cajun Fest

April 23-24

This Cajun and Creole celebration includes zydeco, swamp pop, and traditional Cajun music. Traders Village, 2602 Mayfield Road. 972-647-2331; tradersvillage.com/grand-prairie

GREENVILLE

Hunt County Fair

April 22-May 1

The fair includes educational programs and competitions in breeding and showing of livestock. Live entertainment, food, award-winning animals, and a midway with rides and attractions are also featured. Hunt County Fairgrounds, 9800 Jack Finney Blvd. 903-454-1503; huntcountyfair.net

LULING

Roughneck Barbecue and Chili Cookoff

April 1-2

Held in conjunction with the Oil City Vintage Car and Tractor Show, this cookoff is sanctioned by the International Barbecue Cookers Association and Tolbert. Live music is performed all day. Downtown Luling, 421 E. Davis St. 830-875-1922; lulingoilmuseum.org

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MUENSTER

Germanfest

April 22-24

Germanfest celebrates German heritage in this North Texas community founded in 1889. Activities include a 5K, the Metric Century Bicycle Rally, sausage and rib cookoffs, a Karneval and a Kinder Theater for children, live music, arts and crafts, a rock-climbing wall, and folk dancing. *Heritage Park, 301 N. Ash St. 940-759-2227; muensterchamber.com*

SEGUIN

Earth Day Festival

April 30

Businesses, schools, organizations, and green industry groups present ways to protect the environment and conserve natural resources. The event features live music, kid-friendly activities, and over 80 vendors selling crafts, jewelry, food, clothes, and toys. *Central Park, 201 S. Austin St. 830-401-5000; seguintexas.gov/departments/main_street/earth_day.php*

TILMON

Old Settler's Music Festival

April 21-24

Located 12 miles southeast of Lockhart, the festival is a four-day event celebrating roots music. Catch performances by legendary and up-and-coming bluegrass, folk, and Americana artists such as Jason Isbell, Brandi Carlile, and Los Lobos. Local favorites include Sarah Jarosz, Shakey Graves, and Shinyribs. 1616 FM 3158. *oldsettlersmusicfest.org*

WACO

Silo District Marathon

April 22-24

The third annual Silo District Marathon weekend has a race for everyone, including the Boston Marathon-qualifying marathon. *Magnolia Market at the Silos, 601 Webster Ave. 254-235-0603; magnolia.com/visit/events/silo-district-marathon*

SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

SAN ANTONIO

Fiesta San Antonio

Through April 10

For 11 days, the city celebrates its history and diversity with a giant party. More than 100 local nonprofit organizations participate in the festivities and raise funds to support the community throughout the year. Festivities include street fairs, parades, carnivals, charity runs, live music, and pageants. *Various locations. 210-227-5191; fiestasanantonio.org*

DON'T SEE YOUR EVENT?

If you think your event might be of interest to *Texas Highways* readers, submit your information at texashighways.com/submit-event



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THE DAYTRIPPER'S TOP 5



Canyon

A town on the edge

BY CHET GARNER

Near the rim of Palo Duro Canyon, the second-largest canyon in the U.S., lies the appropriately named town of Canyon. It's a community with just the right mix of Panhandle beauty, culture, and adventure to make the area well worth a day trip.

Buff's

There is no better place to fuel up for a full day of tripping than this old-school diner specializing in traditional cowboy breakfasts. My favorite is the "Biscuit and Gravy Slopper," a biscuit topped with your choice of meat, hash browns, cheese, and eggs, all smothered in sausage gravy or pork green chile stew. You might need a nap after consuming it, but once you wake up, you'll be ready to go.

Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum

Set on the West Texas A&M University campus, this is the largest history museum in the state. The art deco building contains exhibits covering every era of life on the plains dating to prehistoric times. Dinosaur fossils stand in the same building as Wild West weaponry, cars that cruised Route 66, trucks that carried black gold, and buggies that settled the frontier. You'll need at least a couple of hours to see it all.

Palo Duro Canyon State Park

The state park protects a stunning canyon that stretches 120 miles long, 20 miles wide, and up to 800 feet deep. The visitor center lookout provides one of the state's most awe-inspiring views. Visitors can explore more than 30 miles of trails like the Lighthouse Trail, which marks a 2.8-mile journey to a giant 300-foot spire known as the symbol of Palo Duro Canyon. Visit in the summer months to catch *TEXAS*, an outdoor musical recounting the frontier history of the Texas Panhandle with actors, dancers, and fireworks.

Palo Duro Canyon Adventure Park

If you're not content experiencing the canyon from the ground, you can enjoy it from the air. This park has zip lines, towers, and bridges to get your heart racing. The thrilling "Canyon Crossing" zip line takes visitors over the canyon on a quarter-mile ride.

Texas Rose Steakhouse

This cowboy steakhouse seasons its steaks to perfection and sizzles them over a flame grill. The restaurant also serves classics like chicken-fried steak and fried jalapeños. Visit on a Friday or Saturday for a slice of smoked prime rib, and save room for a fresh-baked cinnamon roll.

**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 Canyon episode visit thedaytripper.com.
Follow along on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @chettripper.*



Wisdom Found

Toni Tipton-Martin highlights the contributions of Black cooks in American food history

By Ellen Sweets

When speaking at events, Toni Tipton-Martin engages her audiences with historical images depicting African American women cooks, many of them demeaning “mammy” stereotypes. “For years, I have opened my presentations with this question: What wisdom can be learned from Aunt Jemima besides how to tie a bandana or prepare her own recipe for pancakes?” Tipton-Martin says.

It’s a question the Baltimore-based chef, food writer, and historian has explored in two books: 2015’s *The Jemima Code: Two Centuries of African American Cookbooks*; and 2019’s *Jubilee: Recipes from Two Centuries of African American Cooking*. Each book won an award from the James Beard Foundation, a nonprofit that recognizes the most prestigious accomplishments in American food culture.

Born and raised in Los Angeles, Tipton-Martin got her start as a journalist at the *Los Angeles Times* and later joined the *Plain Dealer* in Cleveland, where she

“I began a journey dedicated to uplifting marginalized folks. I looked for role models and examples of Black culinary excellence to broaden my ancestral legacies.”

was the first African American to serve as food editor of a major metro newspaper. In 2000, Tipton-Martin moved with her family to Austin, where they lived for 18 years. Though she refers to her occupation in Austin as “stay-at-home mother,” it’s where she began the extensive research that led to the creation of her two books, including collecting more than 475 African American cookbooks dating to 1827. During her time in Texas, Tipton-Martin also served as president of Southern Foodways Alliance and helped establish Foodways Texas, which celebrates and preserves the state’s diverse food cultures.

Tipton-Martin’s work takes her around the country for discussions that promote racial reconciliation by elevating the previously ignored contributions to American food made by enslaved and marginalized Black cooks. She’s even visited the White House as a guest of Michelle Obama in 2011, when the former first lady launched the “Chef’s Move to Schools” program that paired local chefs with schools in their

communities to create healthy meals.

In 2020, Tipton-Martin was named editor-in-chief of *Cook's Country* magazine, which is published by America's Test Kitchen. And in November, the Julia Child Foundation honored Tipton-Martin with its annual Julia Child Award that recognizes people who make a "profound difference in the way people eat, drink, and cook." Tipton-Martin says she plans to use the \$50,000 prize to revive the work of the SANDE Youth Project, a nonprofit she founded in Austin in 2008 to "promote the connection between cultural heritage, food, and a healthy community."

TH: *What got you into food writing?*

TTM: When I was in college, I thought an entry-level job at the local weekly might help me hone the skills I was learning in journalism classes. Despite wanting to write hard news and follow the police beat, my editor promoted me to food editor. I took those newfound skills to the *LA Times*, where I wrote about food and nutrition.

TH: *How did The Jemima Code come about?*

TTM: After Dad died [in 1995], I quit my job, co-authored a cookbook, and started a new life in Texas as a stay-at-home mother raising two preteens, a kindergartner, and a toddler. To give my life purpose, I began a journey dedicated to uplifting marginalized folks. I wanted to change the narrative that healthy living was only for rich white people. I looked for role models and examples of Black culinary excellence to broaden my ancestral legacies, to tell a broader history of African American foodways, to prove that America's invisible Black cooks had tended vegetable gardens not just as a response to hardship, but as good stewards of the environment.

TH: *Was it tough finding a publisher for The Jemima Code?*

TTM: I proposed a book of essays about Black cooks to several publishers who decided *TJC* [*The Jemima Code*] should be a scholarly work. In short, it was considered "too much" for me. So, with food sections and journalism as the model, I did what my ancestors would have done:

I self-published *TJC* as a blog on Wednesdays, newspaper food day. My approach was well-received, and UT Press offered to publish it as I envisioned it—as an attractive, informative coffee table book.

TH: *Did you start with Texas women?*

TTM: I found women from all across the nation, including some in Texas: Lucille Bishop Smith of Fort Worth, who established the commercial cooking and baking department at Prairie View A&M University; Bessie Munson of Arlington, who in the 1970s urged followers to explore such exotica as pistachio pudding, orange and olive salad, and paella. Sometimes I found material in the Austin History Center, other times through a casual late afternoon conversation with my friend Hoover Alexander [owner of Hoover's Cooking on Manor Road], just sitting in one of the booths in his restaurant.

TH: *How was The Jemima Code received?*

TTM: The response was mixed. I met with some resistance, mostly from African American women still stinging from exaggerated representations of our ancestors in servitude.

TH: *Was Jubilee planned as a companion to The Jemima Code?*

TTM: I have always envisioned *TJC* as a large and varied project. The depth of the African American culinary experience is too much for a single work. A list of book concepts that might spring from the collection kept me focused.

TH: *Is this project still playing out?*

TTM: It is. First came *TJC*, an introduction to cookbook authors that validated their knowledge, skills, and abilities by using the same system that had marginalized them and almost erased them from America's culinary history. With *Jubilee*, I wanted people to see the recipe-development skills embedded in their writing. By including original recipes alongside their adaptations, it was purely a journalist's statement of facts, my way of producing evidence. The books complement each other.

TH: *Has the success of your books put*

more pressure on you?

TTM: *The Jemima Code* has been described as the zeitgeist. I called it a watershed moment. Our mission, in part, is to examine the connection of food, culture, and community. I was a founding member of the Southern Foodways Alliance in Oxford, Mississippi. The symposium was designed in part to examine the confluence of food, history, race, and class. Conversations were primarily among scholars at Ole Miss. But those experiences gave me the impetus to pursue my path to honoring women, and a few men, who history had pretty much forgotten.

TH: *What's up next for you?*

TTM: I've dedicated my career to strengthening community by raising cultural culinary awareness. My projects exist to preserve, promote, and celebrate the neglected legacy of America's Black cooks. I'm finding answers by writing a memoir. And in my spare time, I'm planning children's books, a novel, and a docuseries.

TH: *How does your new job at Cook's Country magazine fit in?*

TTM: I'm focused on telling stories about the people behind the recipes America loves, favorites like mac and cheese and meat loaf or regional classics—think Texas chili, Louisiana gumbo, Carolina barbecue, or Boston baked beans. They're simple dishes for weeknights, uncomplicated dishes that can be made in a single pot. We'll still help our readers become more confident cooks, but we're also reconsidering the best way to represent the diversity of the American recipe canon. **L**

Learn more about Toni Tipton-Martin and her cookbooks on her website, tonitiptonmartin.com. Tipton-Martin is also a member of the cast of the *Cook's Country* TV show on PBS.

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

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

VINTAGE

BY JAC DARSNEK, TRACES OF TEXAS




Nerves of Steel

PECOS RIVER, 1922

Standing 320 feet above the Pecos River, the Pecos High Bridge was the tallest bridge in America when it opened in 1892 to improve the Southern Pacific Railroad's route between El Paso and San Antonio. Engineers used 1,820 tons of steel for the span's construction, which was marred by an accident that killed seven workers. Judge Roy Bean, the Langtry saloon operator and justice of the peace, rode 12 miles by mule to pronounce the men dead, according to T. Lindsay Baker's 1986 book, *Building the Lone Star*. Bean pronounced three injured men dead, too, over protests from onlookers. "They ain't dead yet, but they will be," Bean replied. "And you don't think I'm going to ride that mule back up here later just to do what I'm doing now." Though the three ultimately recovered, the bridge gained a reputation as a treacherous crossing, whether by foot, horse, or train. A new bridge replaced this one in 1944. **L**

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



DESTINATION

BRYAN TEXAS

A Legend Reborn

Born of converging cultures & built on deep Texas roots, Bryan is a community filled with authentic stories, people, and places - our legends. Our legends are ever evolving while staying true to our Texas spirit.



Discover Our Legends:
destinationbryan.com/txhighways