

Here Come the Wildflowers!

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ISSUE EVER!

TEXAS

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TEXAS

HIGHWAYS

The TRAVEL MAGAZINE of TEXAS *** APRIL 2015

Wild Drives

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WILDFLOWER
ROAD TRIPS!

Plus

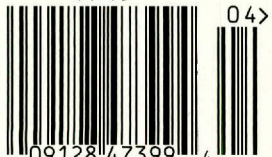
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TEXANS

Keep it FRESH!

Be Bowled Over by Texas Ceramics

Marsha Landers, of **ClayThings Pottery and Sculpture Studio**, is a sixth generation Texan and proud of it! At her studio in Cove, she offers pottery lessons, creates handmade sculptures, hosts workshops and sells her handmade pottery. Marsha is inspired by all the sights and sounds across our beautiful state—she even has a glaze design inspired by the beautiful Big Bend Region. She's been creating ClayThings in Texas for over thirty years and modestly claims she still knows "very little about the clay." In fact, Marsha compares her exploration of clay to discovering Texas, the more she learns, the more she wants to know!

GLAZED YARN BOWL

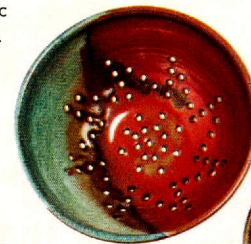
Keep your knitting project organized with this handy yarn bowl. Non-toxic glaze. 5.5 inches across.

37841.....\$49.95

GLAZED BERRY BOWL

Keep your fruit and vegetables fresh with this handmade berry bowl set. This bowl has smooth edges and comes with a plate to catch any water so you can take it directly to the table for serving. Non-toxic glaze. 7.5 inches across and 3.5 inches tall.

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HIGHWAYS
THE TRAVEL MAGAZINE OF TEXAS

Follow the Flowers!

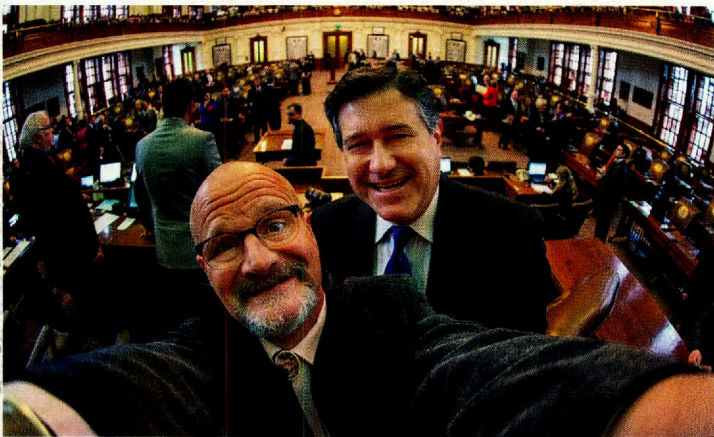
The arrival of wildflowers just seems to set the world right. Whether it's budding Big Bend blue-bonnets or an early pop of wine cups, these beacons of the season bring with them the promise of lush landscapes and longer days. They lead us from winter's nip to spring's warm breezes. As minister and author Thomas Wentworth Higginson wrote in *April Days* in 1861, "The first wild-flower of the spring is like land after sea."

This month, we welcome a new crop of bloomers with our annual wildflower special—16 pages of eye-popping images by photographers tried and new. And writer Melissa Gaskill follows the flowers on four wildflower drives in unexpected locales across the state, from the Brazosport area along our mid-coast to Fort Davis and surrounds out west. It all begins on page 52 with Theresa DiMenno's fantastical photo at Llano County's Prairie Mountain.

Theresa knows something about the guiding force of wildflowers. Her flower images are featured at Houston Methodist Hospital in the Texas Medical Center as part of its "wayfinding" project, which, she says, "utilizes numbering systems, architectural and interior design, artful landmarks, and simple signage" to help people navigate through an environment.

At Houston Methodist, each building features a nature theme with a coordinating color. "Good wayfinding in a hospital promotes healing because it reduces stress, anxiety, and fear," Theresa adds, "enabling patients, visitors, and staff to better

ON THE ROAD AT THE CAPITOL!



Congratulations to former TH Photography Editor Griff Smith (at left), who was recently honored by the Texas House of Representatives for decades of documenting Texas and Texans. State Representative Richard Peña Raymond (at right) called him "The National Photographer of Texas." See an exhibit of Griff's Texas Highways images at the Capitol Visitors Center through March 31.

PHOTO: J. Griffis Smith

WHERE WE'LL BE NEXT MONTH:

Keep your travel to-do list handy for May's summer-vacation planner, featuring our annual picks for the Best Summer Ever, vintage motor courts across the state, and what's new at Houston's Hermann Park. We'll sip a few brews at Saint Arnold, share some tips for the savvy traveler in South Padre, and salute kings and queens of the squeezebox. And anything you want on Roy Orbison—you got it.



ANY TIPS ON THESE SPOTS? LET US KNOW ON FACEBOOK OR TWITTER

find their way throughout the facility."

Mark your calendar for the chance to meet Theresa, *TH* Photography Editor Brandon Jakobeit, and other *TH* contributors at a wildflower-photography portfolio review the afternoon of April 25, the opening day of *Texas Highways'* photo exhibit at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin. The exhibit, which runs through May 31, features the flower photos in this issue, along with a collection of our favorite images from years past. Turn to page 67 for more on the Center's gardens, trails, and other springtime events.

Beyond Lady Bird Johnson's legacy at the Wildflower Center, this year marks the 50th anniversary of the Highway Beautification Act she so staunchly supported. The tireless champion of conservancy and beauty in our world once said, "The environment is where we all meet; where all have a mutual interest; it is the one thing all of us share."

Timeless words to consider as we follow the flowers this spring.

Jill

Jill Lawless, Editor



Tell us your favorite comfort food!

See page 6 for details.



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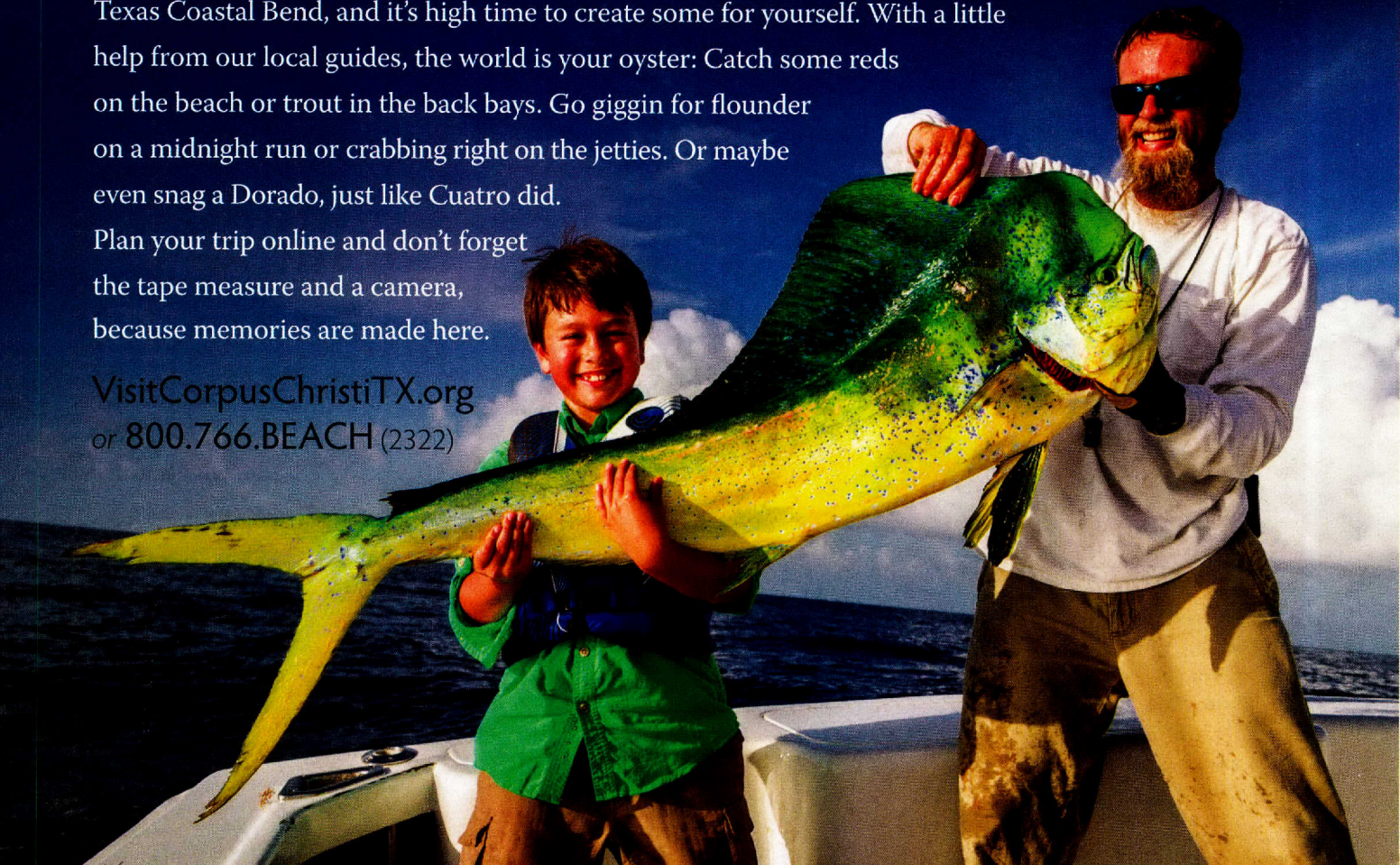
CORPUS
CHRISTI
MUSTANG & PADRE ISLANDS

MEMORIES MADE HERE

When Cuatro, age 7, went fishing with his family this year, he had no idea what he might catch. And he never, ever, in his wildest dreams thought it would be this whopper, a 40lb, technicolor Dorado (aka, *Mahi Mahi*) that he reeled in just off the coast of Corpus Christi. Memories are most definitely made here in the Texas Coastal Bend, and it's high time to create some for yourself. With a little help from our local guides, the world is your oyster: Catch some reds on the beach or trout in the back bays. Go giggin for flounder on a midnight run or crabbing right on the jetties. Or maybe even snag a Dorado, just like Cuatro did.

Plan your trip online and don't forget the tape measure and a camera, because memories are made here.

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APRIL 2015

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FEATURES

52 *The Spectacular Wow!*

A full tank of gas, the open road, and springtime in Texas: From east to west, beach to forest, and prairie to desert, experience four scenic drives sure to whet your senses for the color and joy of wildflower season.

Text by MELISSA GASKILL

68 *The Dallas Barbecue Renaissance*

A new crop of pit masters is extending Big D's zeal for culinary distinction to the realm of traditional Texas barbecue. We take it "slow and low."

Text by JOHN LUMPKIN

Photographs by WILL VAN OVERBEEK



76 *The Lure of the Llano*

A string of inviting riverside towns and parks enhances the natural attraction of the Llano River as it cuts a path through the Hill Country's rugged limestone and granite outcroppings.

Text and photographs by E. DAN KLEPPER



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(39)

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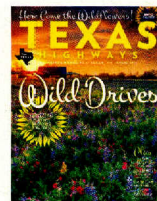
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ON OUR COVER

A spring sunrise near Round Top in Fayette County. Photo © Joe Lowery.

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We'll share some of your tips throughout the year
and **reveal a countdown** of your top comfort-food destinations this fall.

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MY FAVORITE COMFORT FOOD IS: _____

I LOVE IT BECAUSE: _____

THE TEXAS RESTAURANT, CAFÉ, OR DINER THAT DOES IT BEST IS:
(be sure to include the city or town)

MERGE

GOT SOMETHING TO SAY?

ON RETIRED TH PHOTO EDITOR GRIFF SMITH'S LEGISLATIVE RECOGNITION:

You have been the eyes of Texas and showcased it so well. Thanks for the great pictures. Your love of Texas is revealed in every image.

DONOVAN REBEKAH REESE, TH Facebook fan from Granbury



OUR FAVORITE SOCIAL MEDIA OF THE MONTH...



Fire and bacon: Two of my favorite things.
Alise Mullins,
Austin



We adopted a highway! Thanks @DMWT_ Program & @TexasHighways for your making #Texas beautiful. That's music to our ears.
@KerrFolkFest [Kerrville Folk Festival]



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Grandpa Cookie

I enjoyed your excellent article on chuck wagons in the March issue, which made me think of my late grandfather, Louis Hart. He had a reputation as a superb chuck-wagon cook, starting from his life as a Texas cowboy. He grew up working cattle outside Brownwood and Valley Mills, working later on a ranch at Honey Grove before moving to what was then Indian Territory, now Oklahoma, and marrying Grandma.

Cattle drives hardly died out in the 1880s, although they were much shorter in duration as the railroads extended their reach. It still took a few days to drive herds from ranches to nearby railheads, rather than faraway Kansas, and herd crews needed to eat on these trips too. A chuck wagon remained a part of these shorter operations. Grandpa worked one of Oklahoma's last cattle drives in the summer of 1904.

Sadly, his recipes are long gone. My dad, however, made

the best French fries I've ever eaten, based on the way Grandpa cooked potatoes over campfires on the prairie.

PAUL HART
Houston

Salado Arts

In the article "Artistic Enclave" about Salado [March], one of the best landscape artists in Texas was not mentioned. B. Herd has been in Salado for years, and his artwork is some of the best regarding West Texas.

RON SEIFERT
Fairview

That, Too

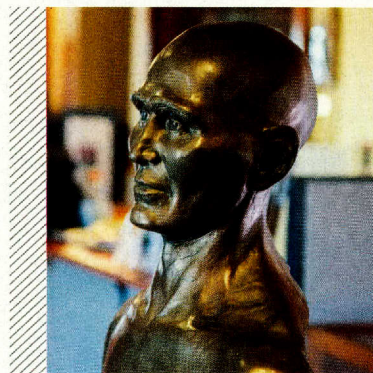
In your March 2015 article on Galveston's Grand 1894 Opera House, you missed some of the better things about the Grand that are on the rear of the Opera House. There are great paintings of the artists who have performed there.

JOHN C. DRISKILL
Alvin

Mesa Hike

I was thrilled to read Laurence Parent's article on hiking to the rim of Santa Elena Canyon on Mesa de Anguila [February]. [continued on page 9 »

MAKING THE HORN SHELTER MAN



With consultation by Dr. Douglas Owsley of the Smithsonian Institution, Texas forensic sculptor Amanda Danning created this facial reconstruction of Bosque County's Horn Shelter Man [January], who lived more than 11,000 years ago. See it at the Bosque Museum in Clifton. Learn more about Danning's work at texashighways.com/webextra.

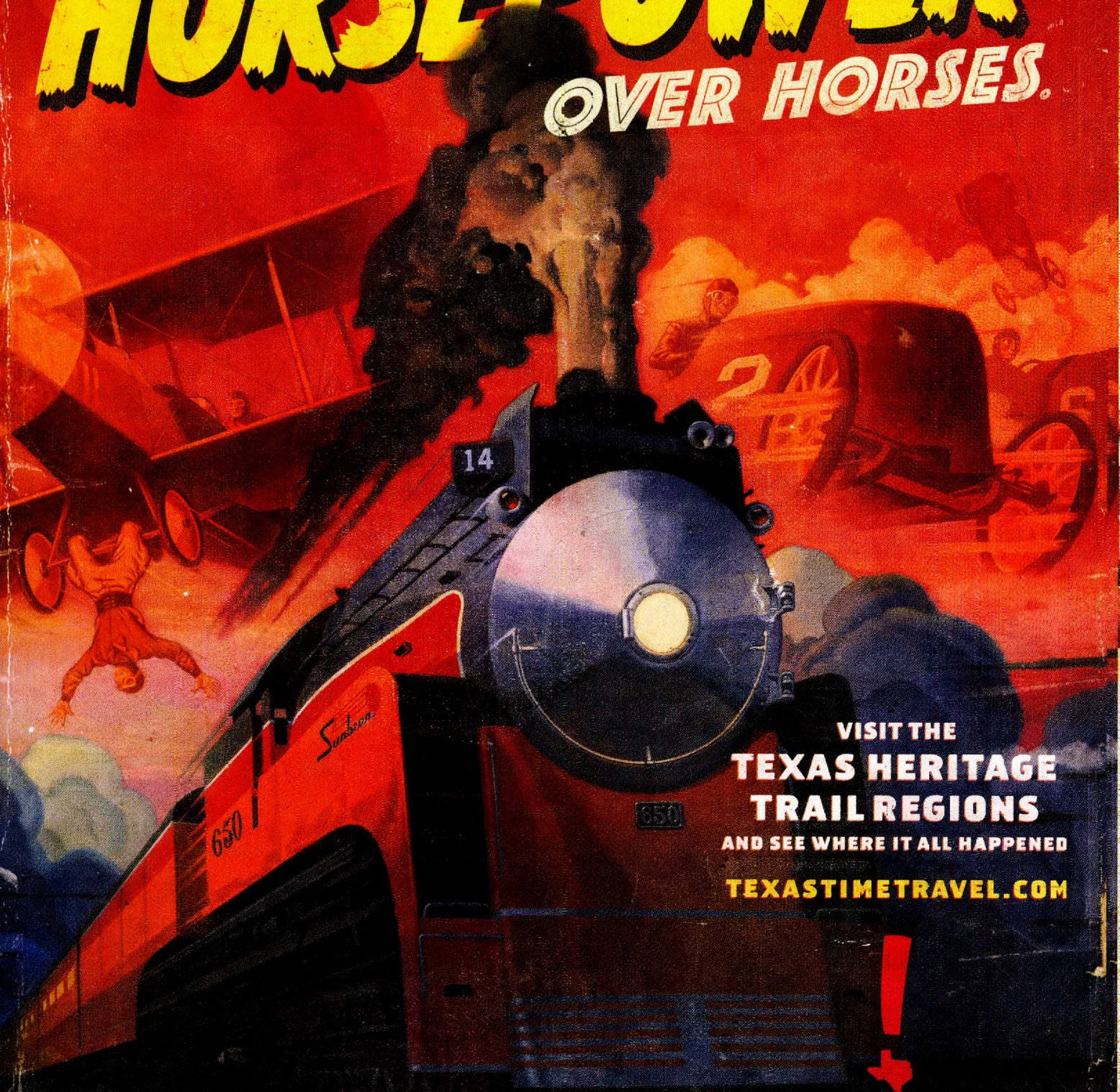


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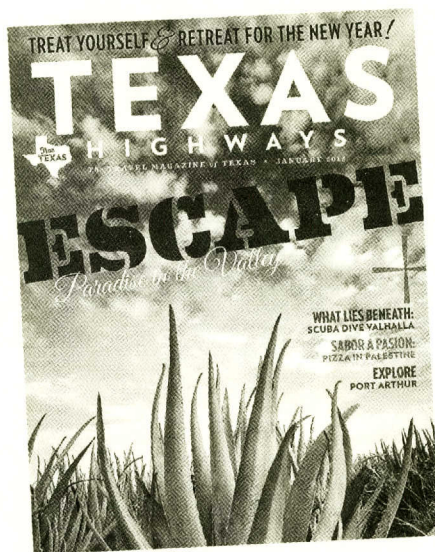
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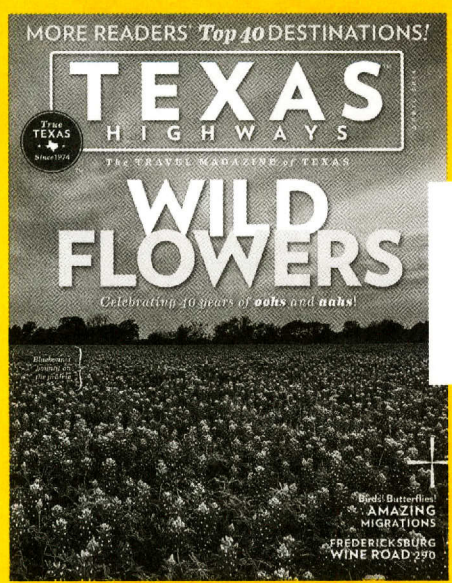
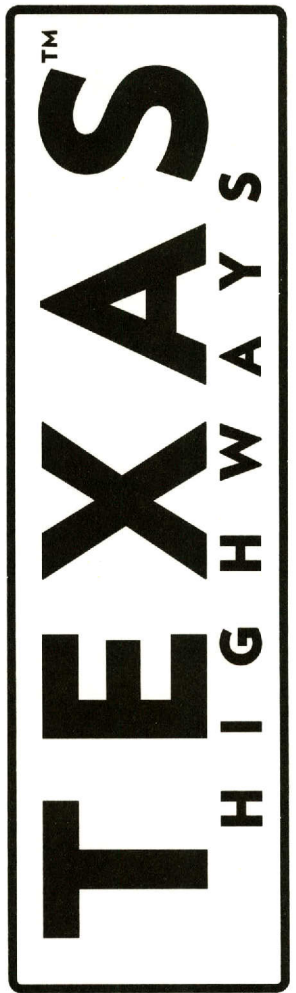
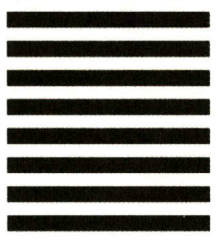
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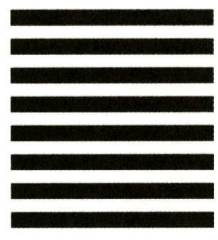
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MERGE

continued from page 7

I have hiked, canoed, and backpacked in the Big Bend region for 30 years. Two years ago I decided to do a similar trek across Mesa de Anguila with the goal of standing on the promontory overlooking the eastern mouth of the canyon as the Rio Grande leaves the canyon and begins to “bend” around the park. The hike started at the same trailhead and was about 14 miles each way. It was spectacular!

SIDNEY J. SANDERS

Houston

Merry March

What a surprise to open my mailbox and find such a treasure in the March issue of the magazine. I absolutely devoured “Home Cookin’ on the Range” because of its historical significance to the Goodnight-Loving cattle drive and the birth of the chuck wagon. Red Steagall’s Wagon Train passes through my hometown of Weatherford every year.

I also discovered delight in reading about the history of James Avery jewelry. I spent several summers at a girls’ camp in Hunt and there received my first piece of Avery jewelry, a gold initial ring, in 1963. Thank you for bringing these memories back for me.

MELISSA PATTERSON

Weatherford



READERS RECOMMEND

Wild About Ann’s

I must tell you about my favorite comfort food fix, Ann’s Seafood in Liberty. Ann’s has a terrific salad bar, prize-winning crawfish étouffée, and great gumbo and grilled tilapia. Sometimes I have the “2 x 2 x 2,” which is two fried oysters, two fried shrimp, and two big pieces of perfectly fried fish, and of course fries, hush puppies, coleslaw, and pinto beans. If you want pie, get there early.

DEBRA MOORE, Liberty

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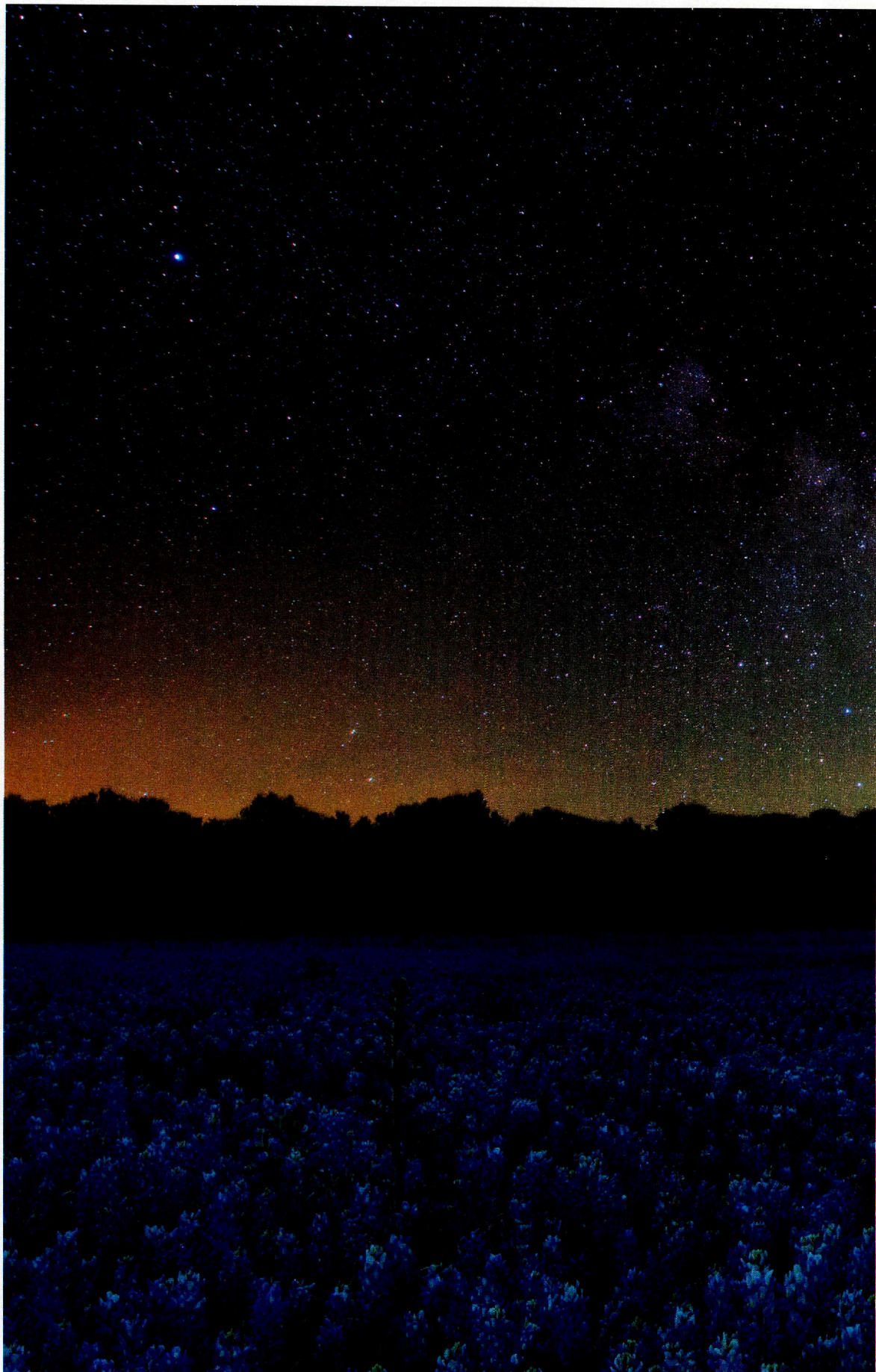


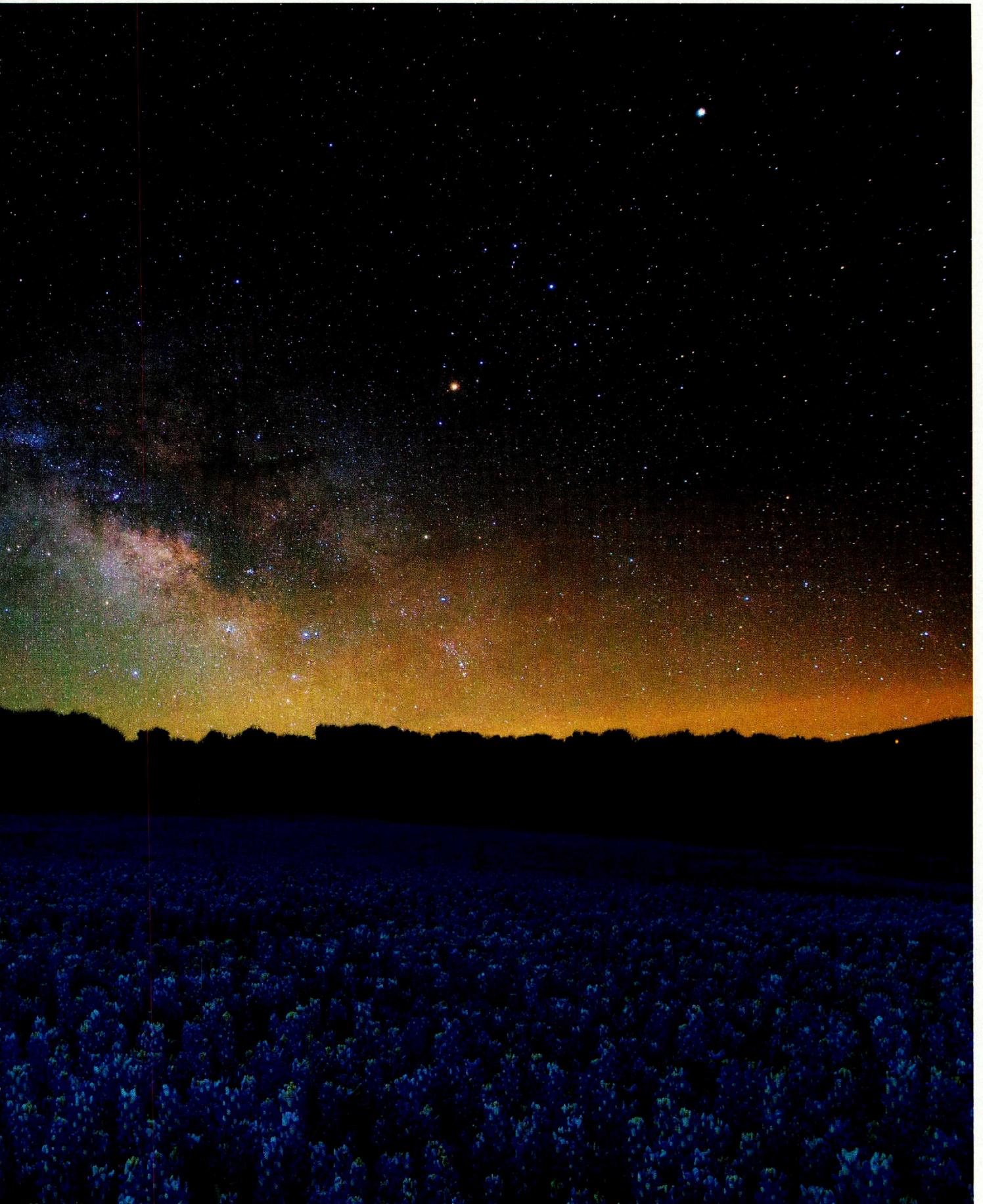
Hill Country

RM 1431 west of Cedar Park provides a great scenic drive year-round, and in the spring, the section between Lago Vista and Marble Falls generally offers good wildflower-viewing spots. A visit to some of the recreation areas along the way can yield spectacular scenes, such as this nighttime view captured last year at Turkey Bend Recreation Area along Lake Travis.



Find more information about Texas wildflowers at www.texashighways.com/wildflowers.





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TEXAS FAMILY

Birds of a Feather

A FAMILY BIRD WALK
AT ESTERO LLANO GRANDE STATE PARK
IN WESLACO

text by DANIEL BLUE TYX



The attendant hands each kid a backpack stuffed with guidebooks, binoculars, and art supplies. Crayons in hand, they record our day's sightings.

A S SOON AS HE SEES THE BOARDWALK, MY FOUR-year-old son Benjamin Byrd—"Byrdie" for short—takes off at a sprint, binoculars jiggling around his neck, while his sister Ana waddles behind him as fast as her two-year-old legs will carry her. "An ibis!" he shouts, already on the observation deck, having climbed a few fence rungs to take in the panoramic view of the pond. Meanwhile, I scan the water's surface, trying to see an ibis among the hundreds of waterfowl. Finally, there it is: the glossy wader with the unmistakable downward-curved bill.

Like many children on the autism spectrum, Byrdie is inclined toward highly specific interests. And ever since he pulled down an unused *Birds of Texas* guide from the bookshelf and asked me and my wife Laura to read it as a bedtime story, birds have been his greatest passion. By the time he was two-and-a-half, he could already identify 300 species, leading our family on an unexpected birding odyssey that has taken us from our home in the Rio Grande Valley to the north woods of Wisconsin. Of all of the places we've visited, though, our favorite family birding destination is still right here: Estero Llano Grande State Park.

Cooped up in the house, Byrdie and Ana always seem to find ways to fight over



ESTERO LLANO GRANDE STATE PARK

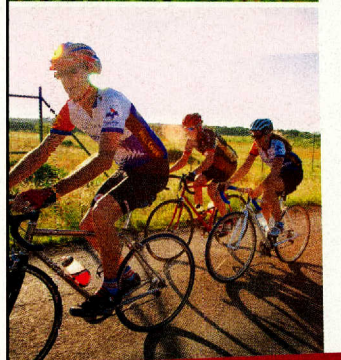
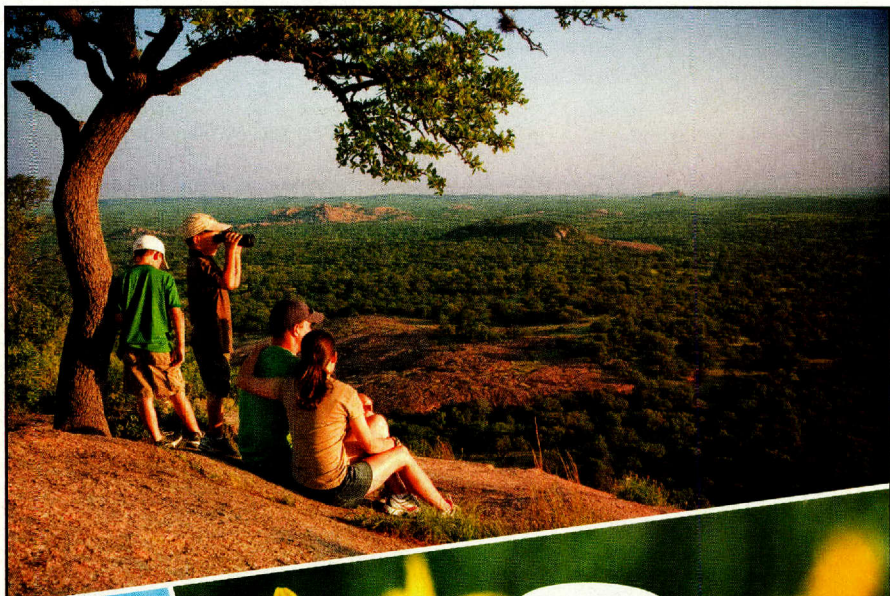
is at 154A Lakeview Drive in Weslaco, just off International Blvd. Call 956/565-3919; www.tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/estero-llano-grande.

one toy or another. But out here at the park, where the only sounds are ducks chattering and marsh canes rustling in the wind, the calm is contagious. I look ahead to the pond and there they are: Byrdie and Ana peering over the railing with their arms around each other's waists—a sight almost as beautiful as the vista itself.

Estero Llano Grande is the geographic center of the World Birding Center, a network of Rio Grande Valley sites that preserves critical habitat for local and migratory birds. We check in at the park Visitor Center—its wood paneling and angular steel roof offering a modern, energy-efficient update on the old Civilian Conservation Corps principle of harmony with the surrounding environment—where Park Interpreter Lorena Guerra greets both kids by name. Then, we head off to the trail, traversing a thorn forest of mesquite and prickly pear cactus, Rio Grande woodlands, and shallow lakes. These pools, once agricultural fields and a dry lakebed, have been restored as the World Birding Center's largest wetland area.

From the boardwalk running along the edge of Ibis Pond, Byrdie sights a chicken-like bird with an orange-and-red mask, like a feathered superhero. "Common gallinule!" he announces. Meanwhile, Ana points up at something yellow in a mesquite branch. "Kiskadee!" she proclaims, clearly proud of her precociousness. I'm always impressed by just how easy it is to navigate Estero Llano with kids. In a mile or less of walking, we see an astonishing diversity of habitats, and many of the birds are in plain sight—easy enough for a two-year-old to see.

In fact, a nocturnal pauraque—one of the rare "Valley specialties" that attracts birders from around the world—is sleeping right next to the trail, its feathers perfectly camouflaged against the underbrush. This must be how the group of birders in front of us, loaded down with expensive scopes and cameras, happens to miss them.



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By the time we approach Alligator Pond, Ana is the one bounding ahead, and she's not disappointed. A 10-foot American alligator sunbathes on the opposite bank. Byrdie, who has trained his binoculars on a night heron perched not three feet away from the gator, looks concerned. Luckily, I tell him, the birds are safe—an alligator resting in the

sun is unlikely to move for anything. The same could be said for us, enjoying juice boxes and Goldfish crackers on the overlook, until at last I glance at my watch. It's time to head home. I carry a tired Ana on my shoulders, while Byrdie runs on ahead, still on the lookout for one last bird.

Back at the Visitor Center, though,

Ana catches a second wind. "Can we get an Explorer Pack?" she asks. Byrdie quickly seconds the motion. "Please," they say, in unison. How can I say no?

The attendant hands each kid a backpack stuffed with guidebooks, binoculars, and art supplies. Crayons in hand, they record our day's sightings. While the kids draw, I page through an extra Explorer Pack sketchpad, admiring drawings from our previous visits, alongside those of other nature-loving kids who had also taken a few minutes to share their observations and memories.

In a mile or less of walking, we see an astonishing diversity of habitats, and many of the birds are in plain sight—easy enough for a two-year-old to see.

Looking at the drawings, I'm struck by the way our visits to Estero Llano Grande mark the passage of time in our family's life: summer night hikes; the hayride and costume contest at the Spooky Science Fest (Byrdie was a great egret for Halloween); Christmas buñuelos and hot cocoa; and the spectacular spring migration, when birds from all over the hemisphere pause in Texas during their transcontinental journeys for much-needed rest. Similarly, Estero Llano Grande has become our family's rest stop, a place to step away from the everyday challenges of raising two young kids and reflect on the lasting beauty of seasons past—and seasons to come.

At last, the sun edges toward the line of palms on the horizon. Before long, Mama will be wondering where we are. We pack up and head for the car, but on the way out, the park has one last surprise. Just ahead of us, a green jay flits from one side of the trail to the other, in a dazzling streak of color. "Eenk, eenk, eenk!" it calls, as if bidding us goodbye. Or maybe it's just saying, "See you next time!" ★

Drawn to Life

Audubon's Legacy

March 28 through July 25, 2015

Visit Tuesdays - Saturdays, 9 am - 5 pm



John James Audubon (1785-1851), artist; Robert Havell, Jr. (1793-1878), engraver; *Passenger Pigeon*, 1829, etching and aquatint on paper, hand-colored, in *The Birds of America*, Volume III, Stark Museum of Art, Orange, Texas. 11.1.2.C. Photograph by Will France.

This exhibition explores how John James Audubon changed the way we see nature.

Drawn to Life reveals how the artist accomplished monumental projects in portraying North America's birds and animals in lifelike poses and in their natural habitats.

The exhibition features the Stark Museum of Art's extensive collection of Audubon's art including pastels, engravings, lithographs, printed books, and manuscripts.

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Pineapple Express

A FRUIT CUP ON STEROIDS IN LAREDO

text by Lori Moffatt

OVER LUNCH WITH SOME NEW friends from Laredo last spring, I learned of an event in the Gateway City that piqued my interest—the annual International Sister Cities Festival, which brings nearly 200 Mexican artisans to Laredo to sell their wares and show off their traditions. “It’s a big shopping party and my favorite event of the year,” one friend confided.

There was a time when I made frequent trips to Laredo to shop at the city’s import stores, explore the markets and restaurants across the Rio Grande in Mexico, and people-watch in the plaza fronting Laredo’s historic La Posada Hotel. When

Piñas preparadas are found throughout South Texas at drive-through beverage barns, snow-cone shops, and snack bars. Try one!

dinnertime came around, I’d load up on \$2 tacos at places like Taco Palenque, a fast-casual Laredo-based Tex-Mex chain that has one of my all-time-favorite condiment bars—complete with not only multiple kinds of salsas but also roasted serrano chiles, pickled red onions, and fresh cucumbers and radishes.

But I hadn’t been to Webb County in awhile. And since I had a blank spot in my calendar for the festival’s 12th anniversary last July, I booked a room at a hotel near the festival site and made the 3 1/2-hour drive south from Austin with a shopping list as long as a South Texas horizon.

“Where should I go to eat?” I had asked a Laredo friend by email beforehand. “Is there anything I should try that you consider a Laredo specialty?” I mentioned that I’d recently become a fan of New Orleans-style shaved ice, and could she recommend a spot for a snow cone or *raspa*, the snow cone’s Tex-Mex cousin?

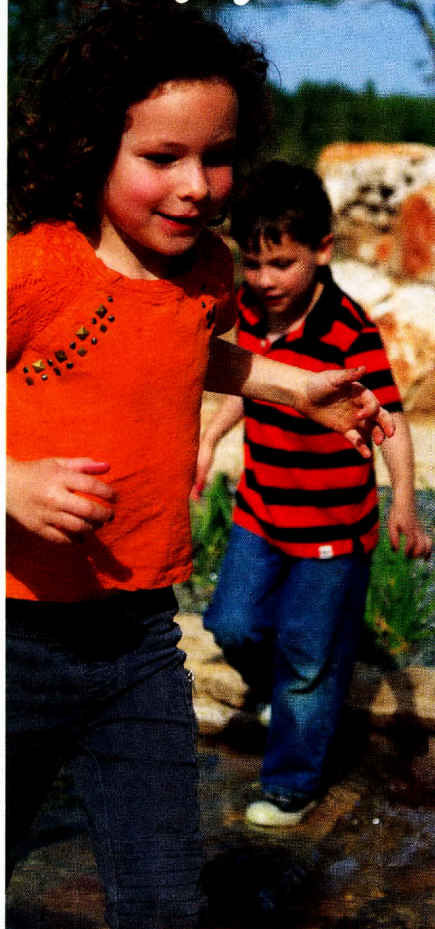
I can imagine the mischievous glint in her eyes as she wrote back: “Yes, there’s this really refreshing *raspa* at Tropical Sno called the chupacabra. It’s a strawberry-flavored *raspa* with chopped pickle bits and chili powder—so yummy! But have you tried a *piña preparada*? Laredo has some drive-through stores where you can find them. They are actual pineapples that have been hollowed out and filled with fruit, gummy bears, a rainbow sour-candy strip, and *chamoy* sauce. And they come with a flavored Smirnoff cooler of your choice.”

That sounded outrageous and yet delicious. Little did I know that it would be but one of several outstanding edibles I’d encounter in this border city.

Crowds were already filing into the Laredo Energy Arena by the time I arrived to the Sister Cities Festival at 10 a.m., shopping bag in hand. As mariachi ensembles and *folklórico* dancers prepared for performances throughout the day, I wandered below colorful *papel picado* streamers among the booths, each one offering different arts and crafts from throughout Mexico,

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PIÑA PREPARADA

A *piña preparada* is adaptable to whatever fruits, candies, and beverages you have on hand.

Cut the top off the pineapple and use a knife or coring device to remove the fruit. Chop it up, leaving some in rings. Add pineapple chunks, cherries, apple slices, peach slices, grapes, and strawberries to the pineapple.

Decorate with gummy-bear candies, sour strips, pineapple rings, and anything else that strikes your fancy. Drizzle *chamoy* sauce (a condiment made of fruit, sugar, salt, and chile) on the fruit.

Add a tamarind straw (available at Alamo Candy in San Antonio) and the beverage of your choice.



Laredo, and Spain. Oaxacan rug weavers Marina and Juan Gonzales had traveled more than 20 hours by bus to get here, while others—including Laredo-born Elsa Rodriguez Arguindegui, who oversees the La India spice business her grandparents started in Laredo in 1924—represented home-grown successes.

Amid the woven baskets, enameled Mayan calendars, tapestries, jewelry, and clothing were vendors selling candies, honey, nuts, spices, dried meats, teas, perfumes, and body-care items like chamomile shampoo and skin creams. I left, nearly four hours later, with a bag brimming with edibles and cosmetics that promised dewy skin and boosted confidence.

But as candied pecans and coconut cookies do not a meal make, I joined a friend downtown for a late lunch followed by a celebrated *piña preparada*.

Founded in 1755 as part of a Spanish effort to thwart French settlement of the area, Laredo today is a major inland port and one of the fastest-growing cities in Texas. But its downtown historic district, anchored by the 1872

San Agustín Church; the 1916 La Posada Hotel; and the Republic of the Rio Grande Museum (the latter housed in an adobe residence constructed in 1830), is relatively small and definitely worth a few hours' exploration on foot. Time it around lunchtime and stop in for a meal at El Mesón de San Agustín, a tiny, family-owned restaurant that offers a daily menu of home-style Tex-Mex dishes in a 150-year-old building. Tucked into a table by the cash register and a beverage case, I savored a plate of hearty *albondigas en chile chipotle* (meatballs in chipotle sauce) and tried to save room for that pineapple.

We had to drive around awhile to find one. These drive-through beer *cuevas* (caves), it seems, pop up and then move on, like food trucks do in Austin. We passed a place called Granolandia—"the best corn in town!" before pulling into a *cueva* clearly proud of its *piña preparada* prowess. While I marveled slack-jawed at the tower of fruit-flavored malt liquor bottles, my friend ordered two *piñas preparadas* and handed over \$20.

The order seemed to take forever. As we sat in the car listening to the radio,

SOUVENIR

I heard chopping, a can opener, the “pop” of a vacuum-sealed jar releasing. Then, as I tried desperately not to laugh, we were delivered two rather unwieldy football-size pineapples through the driver’s side window, along with an accompanying libation we’d open back at the hotel.

The pineapples, crowned with cherries and strawberries, with red rivulets of spicy-sweet *chamoy* syrup dusted with chile powder, appeared both breathtaking and lurid, like prom queens dressed as circus clowns. We took our first sip in the lobby of La Quinta, under the bemused eyes of the front-desk clerk and various hotel guests, one of whom took a photo. “Does insulin come with that?” someone joked.

Eat it and weep, skeptics. For while I’d never compare the complexity of a *piña preparada* with the well-composed meals I enjoyed at Laredo’s El Capataz, where I dined on redfish with a lemony purée of garbanzo beans; or at El Mesón, so authentic it could be in Mexico City; or at La India’s Tasting Room Café, where the mole is made from scratch, it’s my favorite memory of this particular trip to Laredo.

It’s the perfect mental souvenir, too: When I’ve made similar piñas for friends at home, amid giggles of disbelief and aborted attempts at sugar abstinence, this question always comes up: When are we going back to Laredo?

It’s been too long. ★

VISITING LAREDO



The 13th annual **International Sister Cities Festival** takes place July 24-26 at the Laredo

Energy Arena. Admission: Free. Call 956/795-2200; www.visitlaredo.com.

El Mesón de San Agustín is at 908 Grant St. Call 956/725-9299; www.elmesondesanagustin.com.

El Capataz is at 7220 Bob Bullock Loop C-7. Call 956/723-7400; www.el-capataz.com.

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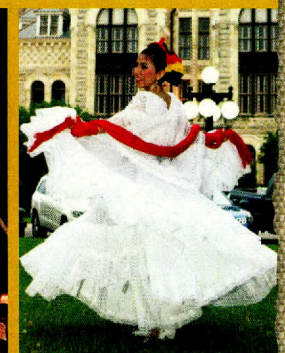
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It's No Secret

THE GRAND MASONIC LODGE IN WACO

text by **Gene Fowler**

**STATELY
SYMBOLISM**
*A stained-glass
window at the
temple's entry
depicts the
first formal
Masonic meeting
in Texas, held
in March 1835 at
the "Masonic
Charter Oak"
near Brazoria.*

A

SI WATCHED NEIL ARMSTRONG AND BUZZ ALDRIN plant the American flag on the moon in the summer of 1969, I had no idea that Aldrin was also laying ceremonial claim to the mysterious orb on behalf of an enigmatic group of my fellow Texans.

I learned about that part of the Apollo 11 mission on a recent visit to the Memorial Masonic Grand Lodge Temple in Waco, state headquarters for the fraternal order and home of a museum and library documenting Masonic history in Texas. The Masons trace their Lone Star roots to 1835 and boast such influential members as all four Republic of Texas presidents and 31 Texas governors. The museum's artifacts reflect that broad—and sometimes quirky—span of Texana, including the deputation letter that Aldrin, a Texas Mason, carried to the moon and back, placing the celestial body under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Texas and establishing a Masonic lunar outpost called Tranquility Lodge No. 2000.



THE MEMORIAL MASONIC GRAND LODGE TEMPLE

is at 715 Columbus Ave. in Waco. Opens 8:30-4 weekdays. Free tours are offered 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. Call 254/753-7395; www.grandlodgeoftexas.org.

While Freemasonry, the oldest and largest fraternal organization in the world, is widely known for its shrouded rituals, I learned that the group is not nearly as inscrutable as many believe. “The purpose of Freemasonry is to take good men and make them better,” explains librarian Bruce Mercer. “Masonic principles teach the value of relief—or charity—and through charitable outreaches like the Shriners Hospital for Children in Galveston and the Texas Scottish Rite Hospital in Dallas, the 79,000 Masons of Texas make their presence known throughout the state.”

As noted on the Grand Lodge website, the Masons keep their rituals secret because “an element of secrecy serves to heighten interest in Masonic teaching” and “because most people would not benefit from being introduced to Masonic teachings out of the context of the Masonic degree system.”

Located a few blocks south of the

The Republic of Texas Exhibit showcases Masonic history from the period when Texas was an independent nation. Many Texian rebels at the Alamo and the Battle of San Jacinto were Masons.

McLennan County Courthouse, the Grand Lodge’s majestic limestone edifice features sculptural friezes that depict the quarrying of stone, felling of timbers, and other labor that went into the construction of King Solomon’s Temple as described in the Bible. A celestial globe crowns a pillar on one side of the grand entrance, and a terrestrial globe crowns a pillar on the other. “In the early days of Freemasonry,” explains staff member James Herold, “its myths and legends placed the origins of

our order at the building of King Solomon’s Temple. Although it grew from the medieval guilds, much of our symbolism is based on the building of King Solomon’s Temple.”

Though most of the building is not air-conditioned, it wasn’t sweltering when I visited this past June. Barbara Mechell, librarian and curator, started our tour in the Memorial Room on the first floor, which honors Texas Masons who served in war. A stained-glass window in the room is full of Masonic symbols, such as the “all seeing eye,” a square, compass, level, and trowel. An American flag on display flew over Hickam Field at Pearl Harbor when the Japanese attacked on December 7, 1941.

The expansive lobby showcases dioramas of Texas Masonic history and life-size statues of Republic of Texas presidents Sam Houston and Anson Jones. Jones was the first grandmaster of the Texas Grand Lodge and carried

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DETOUR

the charter for the first lodge in Texas in his saddlebags during the Battle of San Jacinto.

Also on the first floor, the Republic of Texas Exhibit showcases Masonic history from the period when Texas was an independent nation. Many Texian rebels at the Alamo and the Battle of San Jacinto were Masons. Artifacts in the

room include a Mexican sword from the Alamo, a Masonic jewel found some 11 feet underground during a 1982 excavation at the Alamo, and a lock of Sam Houston's hair donated by his great-grandson. Gavels—important items at every Masonic gathering—on display were carved from fallen limbs of the “Masonic Charter Oak,” a Brazoria oak

tree that shaded an early assembly in 1835. A Grand Lodge of the Republic of Texas apron in the room is perhaps the state's earliest example of the decorated Masonic apron, one of the order's most important items of attire. This particular apron features the Masonic all-seeing eye, a five-pointed star, and the letters G.L.R.T.



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The Masons trace their Lone Star roots to 1835 and boast such influential members as all four Republic of Texas presidents and 31 Texas governors.

In the expansive basement, a corridor lined with photographs of Masonic Lodge buildings throughout the state leads to two large rooms filled with fascinating exhibits. In addition to the memorabilia of Masonic history—gavels, aprons, medals, jewels, and artwork of a historical, religious, and pastoral nature—the gallery exhibits focus on military history, the railroad, Texas history, and the Holocaust. “It's not as widely known that the Nazis targeted multiple nationalities, religions, and organizations, including Masons, who did not conform to Nazi ideology,” explains Mechell.

Indeed, members of Freemasonry have played witness to epic historical events across the world over hundreds of years, but it remains to be seen how the group will fare in the 21st Century. Typical of most fraternal organizations, Masonic membership is declining in Texas and nationwide—down 68 percent nationally since 1966, according to the Masonic Service Association—as older members die off at a faster pace than new members enroll.

Spend an hour or so perusing Texas Masonic history with friendly guides, and I guarantee that your visit will be enlightening—whether you're a member of the group or merely interested in taking a peek at some of its not-so-secret elements. ★



Rockin' Reimers Ranch

LEARNING THE ROPES AT MILTON REIMERS RANCH PARK

text by Chet Garner

The park is an outdoorsman's paradise, attracting visitors looking to disappear for the day into the calming vibe of the Texas Hill Country.

MY FINGERS WERE CRAMPING BUT MY LEGS weren't shaking ... yet. I had a solid foothold but a somewhat questionable grip on a quarter-inch ledge of limestone about 25 feet above the ground. I repeated the words "don't look down" in my head, afraid of what a momentary lapse in focus might do to my already struggling strength.

"How you doing up there?" my buddy Brannndon yelled from below, holding the other end of my rope (and consequently my life) in his hands. Brannndon had convinced me to attempt this climb; one well beyond my previous experience. "I blame you for everything!" I yelled back. He laughed.

Brannndon and I were rock climbing in the Texas Hill Country about 30 miles



REIMERS RANCH PARK

is at 23610 Hamilton Pool Rd. in Dripping Springs. Call 512/264-1923; <https://parks.traviscountytx.gov/find-a-park/reimers-ranch>.



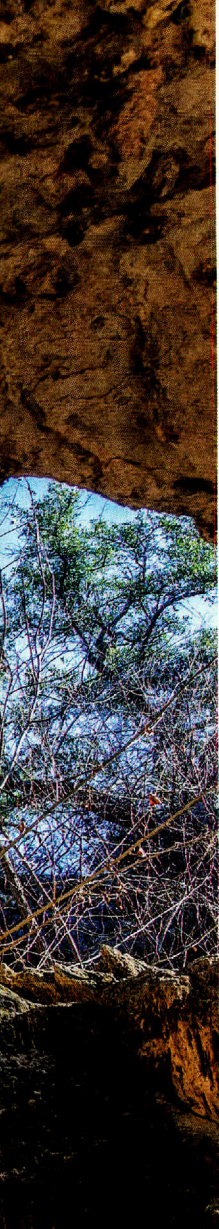
west of Austin at Milton Reimers Ranch Park, a 2,427-acre park purchased by Travis County in the largest private-land acquisition in county history. This oasis of limestone, cedar, and Texas sunshine along the Pedernales River is a beautiful part of Texas, where scrubby brush and limestone trails collide with flowing water and natural springs. Just upriver are two of the most spectacular grottos in America, one the centerpiece of the Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center and the other the famed Hamilton Pool Preserve, a natural oasis that's part of the federal Balcones Canyonlands Preserve system.

The park is truly an outdoorsman's paradise, attracting visitors looking to disappear for the day into the calming vibe of the Texas Hill Country. The

ranch offers more than five miles of hiking trails, 18 miles of mountain-biking trails, and three miles of river frontage for swimming or paddling. Birders come for a chance to spot the endangered golden-cheeked warbler, while anglers try their luck casting for white bass and perch. As I hung on for dear life to the side of an unforgiving limestone cliff, I realized that some activities are more difficult than others.

While rock climbing can be intimidating, an experienced guide or organized climbing group can help you learn the ropes. Reimers doesn't offer classes or guides, but a quick Google search will reveal rock-climbing gyms and clubs you can join. Reimers Ranch has dozens of different climbing routes, meaning there is a challenge for all skill levels.

Most routes have unsettling names like "Crankenstein," "House of Pain Buttress," and "Dark Side." I'm glad for that, because there wouldn't be much to brag about if they had names like "Pretty Princess" or "Cupcake's Delight." Luckily, all routes are also numbered (on a scale of 5.0-5.15) to help climbers gauge their difficulty. A climb rated between 5.0 and 5.4 is a steep incline requiring the climber to use both feet and hands. Climbs between 5.5 and 5.8 require a rope and a relatively high level of skill, and climbs progress in difficulty from there. Anything 5.11 and above is, in my opinion, for crazy people capable of clinging to overhanging rocks like spider monkeys and crushing cars with the strength of their mere fingertips.



As I hung on for dear life to the side of an unforgiving limestone cliff, I realized that some activities are more difficult than others.

To complicate things a bit, there are also different methods of climbing. The most popular at Reimers is called "sport climbing," where climbers secure themselves as they move up the wall by clicking carabiners into bolts permanently affixed to the climbing surface. Each reassuring "click" means you're one step closer to the top and have less distance to fall if you lose your grip.

While I've gone on a handful of organized climbs, my experience is minimal compared with Branndon's. His fearlessness and expertise convinced me to attempt a "sport climb" on "Dead Cats" wall, which is rated 5.9 in difficulty. The first 20 feet had gone pretty well, but everything changed when I reached the most difficult part of the climb, called the "crux."

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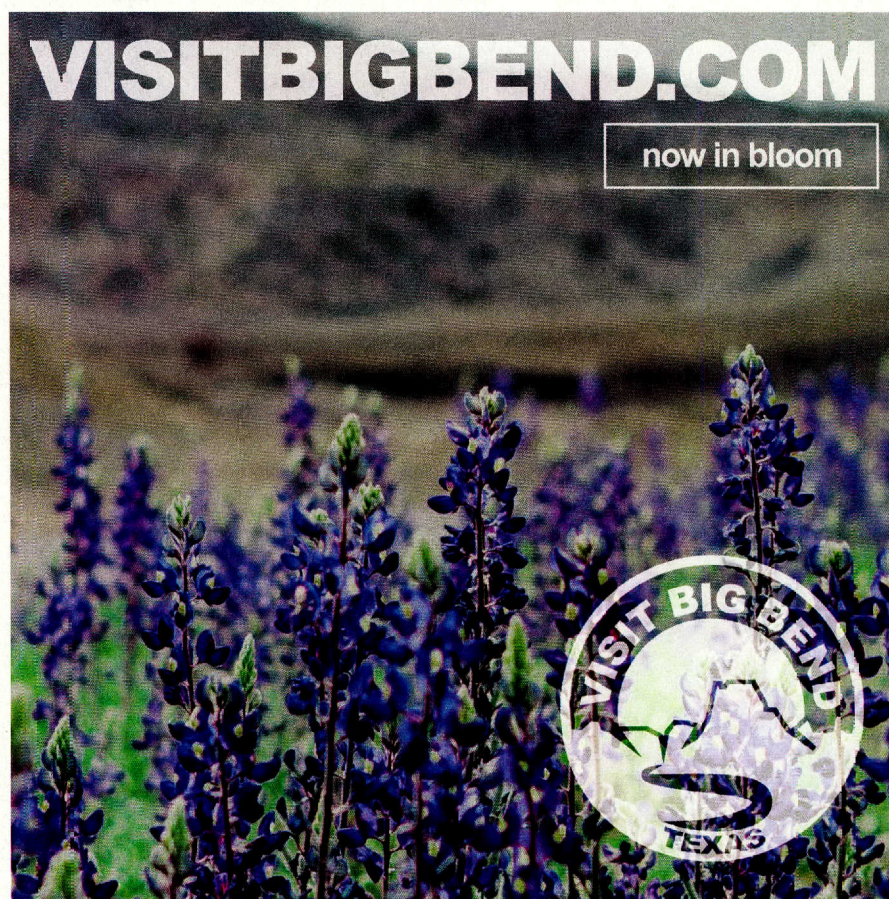
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RUGGED TERRAIN

Reimers Ranch Park offers rock-climbing challenges for adventurers of nearly every skill level.

Two feet above my head was the last bolt. If I could reach it, I would not only “kill the cats” so to speak, but also conquer my most difficult climb to date. However, seeing the bolt and making it to the bolt are two entirely different matters.

My cheek pushed against the stone as my right foot scraped back and forth, scanning the wall by feel for another foothold. “I can come up and give you a boost if you need it,” Brannndon jabbed. His joke wasn’t funny. Besides, I needed him on the ground to hold the rope in

case my herculean climbing attempt failed and gravity took over.

Finally, my toes found something I thought could suffice as a foothold. I couldn’t look down to know for sure. But with a deep breath, I gripped the rock as tightly as I could and slowly shifted my weight onto my right foot. It would hold, but not for long. I felt my toes slipping from the edge as my hands scrambled for another grip. I found one, and in a last-gasp effort, I thrust my carabiner toward the bolt. Click! I felt overcome by a calming sense of relief.

“Yeehaw!” Brannndon yelled. “I knew you could do it.”

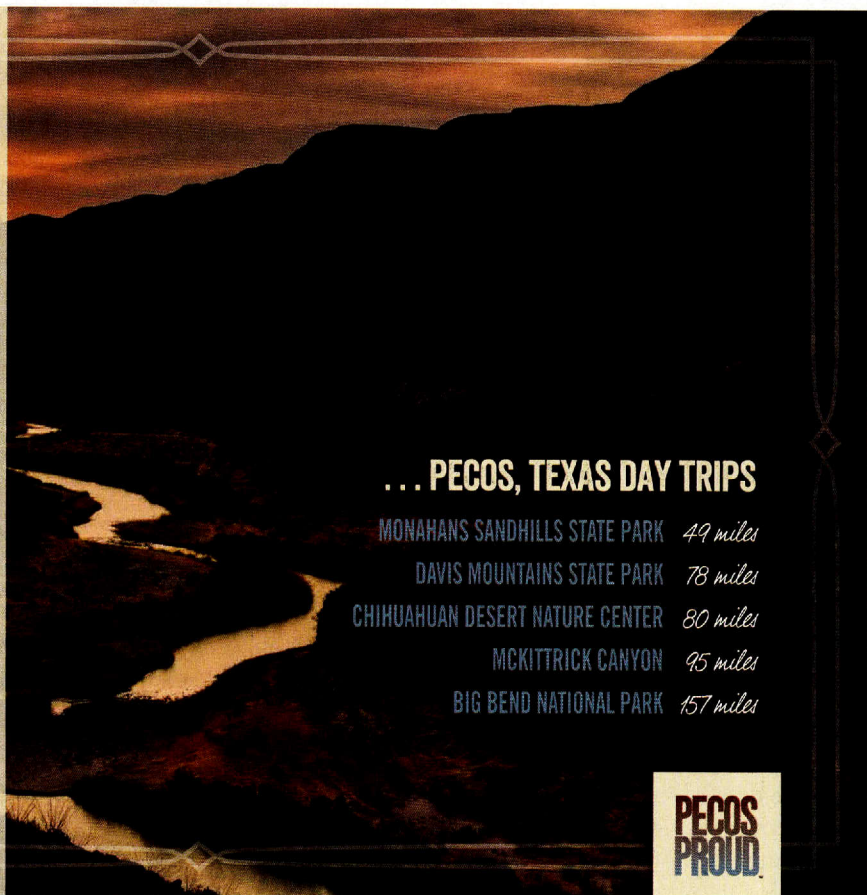
“Yeah, me too!” I hollered back, feigning confidence.

As I rappelled back down, my accomplishment sunk in. In the classic rock-climbing battle of man versus rock, man won ... at least for today. And this is the beauty of a day at Reimers Ranch. Every trip here offers new opportunities, challenges, and adventures as unpredictable as nature itself. ★

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PEARLS OF THE CONCHO
A sampling at Legend Jewelers in San Angelo represents the diversity of shapes of Concho River pearls.

Irregular Radiance

THE RARE BEAUTY OF CONCHO RIVER PEARLS

text by John Morthland

Concho River pearls are found only in the Tampico pearlymussel in the Concho River, its branches, and its reservoirs.

FRANCISCO VAZQUEZ DE CORONADO FAMOUSLY FAILED in his 16th-Century quest to find the fabled Seven Cities of Gold. But legend has it that his expedition across the American Southwest turned up a gemstone that's still treasured by Texas jewelers today: Concho River pearls.

Unlike the round, white gemstones normally prized for pearl jewelry, the pearls produced by a family of mussels in the Concho River around San Angelo come in irregular shapes and colors, ranging from light pink to lavender and deep purple.

"They're a really special gem, at the least likely place on earth you'd expect to find them," says Mark Priest, a longtime San Angelo pearl dealer, referring to the semi-arid West Texas conditions.

Priest's shop, Legend Jewelers, is one of six San Angelo jewelry stores, all locally owned, that craft and sell jewelry with Concho pearls, accenting them with silver, gold, or diamonds in rings, pendants, and earrings. The city also honors the



SAN ANGELO
The San Angelo Convention & Visitors Bureau operates a visitor center at 418 W. Ave. B. For travel information, including lodging and activities, call 800/375-1206; www.visitsanangelo.org.



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CUSTOM FIT

Mark Priest of
Legend Jewelers
shows how jewelry
is custom-designed
for each pearl
to fit the pearl's
irregular shape.



pearl with *Pearl of the Conchos*, a sculpture set in the middle of the Concho River, in front of the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts. The bronze by the late Jayne Charless Beck depicts a life-size mermaid holding a shell with a Concho pearl in her outstretched hand. The museum is on San Angelo's River Walk, which stretches about four miles along the Concho through parks, an amphitheater, and places for fishing and boating.

"Whether for tourists or locals, the pearls are in demand as both souvenirs and as gems," says Janette Sloper of Sloper Jewelry, which sells some pearl jewelry but does most of its business making jewelry for other retail shops.

Concho River pearls are found only in

the Tampico pearly mussel in the Concho River, its branches, and its reservoirs. All mussels are capable of producing pearls, but the Tampico is slightly more prone to producing pearls, with about four in 100 making pearls, says Marsha May, an aquatic biologist with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Texas Mussel Watch project. Mussels produce pearls by coating foreign objects that fall in their shell with nacre, the same pearly substance on the inside of their shells. The reasons that Tampico pearly mussels create more or different pearls than other mussels are not known, May says.

The supply of Concho pearls has diminished over the years under pressure from persistent drought and reduced

water levels, as well as pollution from various sources. Texas Parks and Wildlife began requiring licenses for commercial mussel collection during a surge in interest in the 1980s. Today, there are only eight licensed commercial musselers in the state, and only some of those still collect pearls, May says. Because native, freshwater mussels in general are declining, the state quit issuing commercial collection permits in 2006, and the department has no plans to authorize more.

But then, pearling is a difficult business anyhow. Local waters are murky and hard, with lots of caliche and other minerals; pearlers find mussels by walking in three to four feet of water and feeling for the shells with their toes. In the process, they confront rattlesnakes on the banks, and water moccasins and snapping turtles in the water. Sloper describes pearlers as secretive, "closed-mouth guys who don't

Pearling is a difficult business. Pearlers find mussels by walking in three to four feet of water and feeling for the shells with their toes.

talk about where they get their pearls."

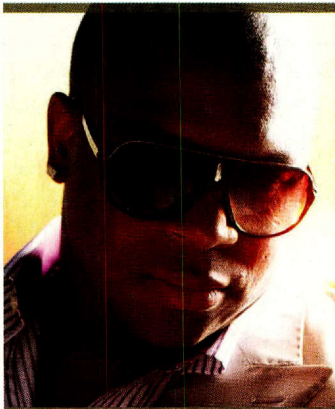
What pearls they do find, they sell to the local jewelers for what amounts to little more than beer money. Most of the pearls that are harvested turn out to be too small or too ugly to be used in jewelry. Priest figures he buys no more than 500 annually.

San Angelo's small pearl industry traces its roots to Bart Mann, a custom jeweler who found thousands of pearls in the late 1950s and kept them around as curiosities before starting to design

jewelry that developed an international following.

Pearl hunters descended on San Angelo from around the state to search for the gems, and a specialized new industry was born. Today, nearly every jeweler in San Angelo who deals in Concho pearl jewelry has personal or family ties to Mann's early operation.

Priest, a Mann protégé whose spacious downtown store offers the largest selection of Concho pearl jewelry in town, said the first thing he looks for in pearls are matching stones, which are good for earrings. Once he's separated those out, only about five percent of the remaining pearls are nice enough to use in jewelry. He says he pays from "\$50 to \$5,000" for each pearl, based on luster (the shinier the better), color (rich, deep purple is most in-demand), shape (both spherical and irregular can be valuable), and size (the biggest ever found was 13 millimeters in diameter,



Michael Lynche

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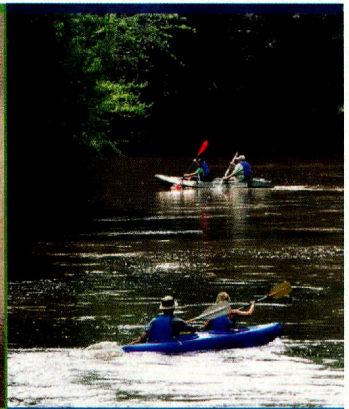
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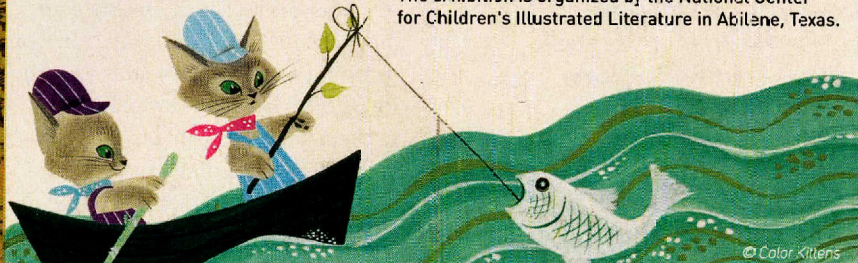
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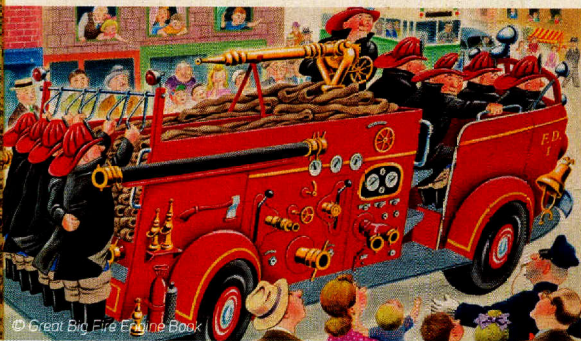


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The exhibition is organized by the National Center for Children's Illustrated Literature in Abilene, Texas.



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though most are one-tenth that large).

Because each pearl is unique, jewelers custom-design around the pearl, rather than trying to fit the gems into fixed pins, pendants, and rings. Sloper says that to her knowledge, only two strands of spherical Concho pearls have ever been strung, and she has the only one available for purchase. It took her late father, who also entered the business working for Mann, 20 years of collecting Concho pearls to gather enough round pearls to make the 16-inch strand.

Mussels produce pearls by coating foreign objects that fall in their shell with nacre, the same pearly substance on the inside of their shells.

More than a few mysteries remain about the pearls. Most jewelers generally attribute the pearls' size and shape to the mineral content in the Concho River and/or the hereditary traits of the Tampico mussel. Cheryl Dorner—whose father, Chester, opened Chester Dorner Jewelry downtown in 1963—has held onto a pearl for 25 years that she swears looks just like three angels. “I still can't decide what to make out of it,” she says.

Priest has one pearl that looks like a cylinder with a point on the end. “I've never seen one like this,” he says, holding it up, “so it will have to go into something special.” But how it got to be that shape in the first place, only Mother Nature knows—and she's not talking. ★

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in San Angelo include the San Angelo Ceramic Invitational Exhibition & Symposium, the Uncorked Wine & Food Festival, and the Nelson McGee Memorial Bluegrass Festival.

Cougartown

TEXAS TICKET



TURN IT UP
The multitalented cast members of Esther's Follies aren't shy about belting out a tune.

A Comedy Carousel

ESTHER'S FOLLIES KEEPS IT FUNNY ON AUSTIN'S SIXTH STREET

text by Joey Held

CHICAGO HAS THE SECOND CITY. New York has Saturday Night Live. Los Angeles has the Hollywood Improv. Closer to home here in Texas, Austin's got its own brand of comedy show: Esther's Follies.

Since 1977, Esther's has invited locals and visitors alike to come down to Sixth Street for a night of, well, just about anything, so long as it brings a smile. The shows, which take place Thursday through Saturday nights, are a blend of scripted comedy sketches and monologues, Broadway-style musical numbers, and magic illusions.

Current events inspire many of the 15 to 20 sketches in

Current events inspire many of the 15 to 20 sketches in each show. Nothing is off-limits.

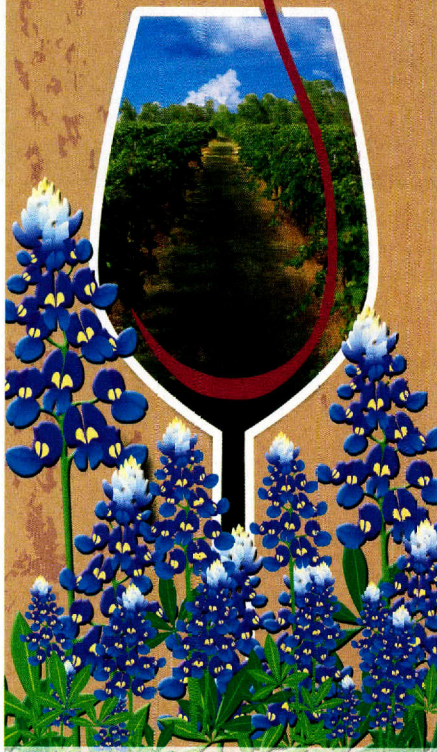
each show. Nothing is off-limits. One minute you'll get a live look at a meeting of cavemen—turns out it's actually just a Congressional hearing; the next, "Martha Stewart" displays a surprising variety of uses for maxi pads, including as a bow tie for a formal evening on the town. The audience guffaws and groans along in the intimate, 300-seat theater, growing more raucous as the theater bar gets busier.

"The best sketches aren't just funny," says Ted Meredith, a nine-year Esther's

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LEVITATE WITH RAY
Ray Anderson's dazzling tricks include this water levitation illusion.

actor and writer who's played everyone from Vladimir Putin to Honey Boo Boo. "They've got a showmanship level, whether athletic skills, or vaudeville, or supernatural ability, that supersedes the comedy."

In between sketches, comedic-magician Ray Anderson dazzles with his head-scratching illusions, which include levitating his assistant with water from the Esther's pool. A 30-year veteran of the show, Anderson collaborates with designers who also work on Las Vegas magic shows, including David Copperfield's. Anyone in the first few rows of the audience is eligible to be part of Anderson's act. In some shows, he serenades a female audience member as he sees her in half in a box. More often than not, the person *next* to the original "selection" also ends up onstage, which is typical of Esther's interactive approach and the actors' penchant for generating laughs—and a few blushes.

Esther's Follies provides a respite from the routine festivities of East Sixth

Street, a corridor of seven or so blocks in downtown Austin lined with bars that attract a raucous crowd, particularly on weekends. But the show also thrives on the revelry outside: The back wall of the stage features two large windows that look out onto the street. And while some of the shenanigans with the windows are planned—an actor portraying a random street urchin twirling a flower and dancing, for example—a good chunk is unscripted. First-time passersby often stop to peer at the show inside, seemingly unaware that the windows have a two-way view.

"You can come here without knowing anything about Texas, Austin, or Sixth Street," Meredith says. "You'll leave knowing things about all of those, while having laughed for an hour and a half."

Co-producers Shannon Sedwick and Michael Shelton headed the troupe that opened Esther's Follies in 1977, naming it for the late swimmer and Hollywood actress Esther Williams. Located 100 feet west from the current location, the

first few shows were performed around a wooden bar. It wasn't long before Shelton and Sedwick, a husband-and-wife team, decided to build a stage, placing it at the front of the building in front of the windows to foster the interactive street entertainment that still contributes to the show's spontaneity.

"The windows create a synergy with the crowd," says Ellana Kelter, who's had two separate stints at Esther's, appearing in sketches and as Anderson's assistant. "We're laughing at something together."

After the original Esther's building burned down in 1982, the group bounced around different Sixth Street locations before establishing its current home in 1991. Throughout the years, the troupe has honored its namesake by decorating the walls with vintage Esther Williams movie posters. The bathing beauty was also featured in the late artist Doug Jaques' 60-by-20 foot



ESTHER'S FOLLIES

is at 525 E. Sixth St. in Austin. Show times are 8 p.m. Thursdays, and 8 and 10 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. Tickets range from \$25 to \$35. Call 512/320-0553; www.esthersfollies.com. The show is open to all ages, but parental discretion is advised due to sexual innuendo and political satire.

mural at the original location, which depicted Williams diving into Sixth Street. When the group found its current home, Jaques re-painted the original mural inside the theater with coral, marine life (both real and imaginary), and a sunken treasure ship.

In the theater's lobby, three giant portraits loom over the waiting crowd, an homage to some of Esther's most famous characters. There's Patsy Cline, as portrayed by Sedwick; the Amazing

Frank, Anderson's alter-ego; and the late Margaret Wiley's Chi Chi La-Bamba, who for many years started each show by discomposing various men in the crowd in her quest to find the "Hunk of the Night."

While everything is fair game at Esther's, the cast makes sure nobody feels personally attacked.

"Our audience comes from all different backgrounds," Meredith says. "I don't want anybody to feel bad because they vote a certain way. All of our comedy is very much steered toward being accessible to as many people as possible."

After the show, the 12 members of the cast meet with guests as the theater spills out onto Sixth Street. It's not uncommon to hear visitors exclaiming, "I had no idea what to expect!" This unpredictable charm has made Esther's an Austin destination for nearly 40 years, with no signs of slowing down. ★

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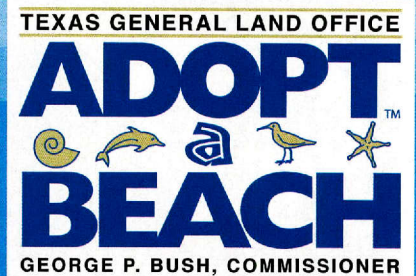
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Hico Hideaway

THIS HAMLET SOUTH OF GLEN ROSE
PICKS UP THE PACE

text by JUNE NAYLOR



THE EIS HAVE IT

One of three businesses that occupy a restored 1902 building in Hico. Eis focuses on edibles sourced in Texas.



FOR MY HUSBAND AND ME, HICO has become a hideaway destination when we seek rest and relaxation. Time was when our trips through Hico—frequently to view wildflowers in springtime—meant stopping only to devour a piece of legendary meringue pie at the Koffee Kup. Back then, the old-fashioned, no-frills café was the primary reason anyone slowed down for long in this little burg.

Today, however, our 80-mile jaunt southwest of Fort Worth focuses on enjoying restorative time at Hico's Upstairs Inn. But as it's situated in Hico's teeny downtown, just a two-minute walk from the Koffee Kup, we initially thought of the inn as a posh place to sleep off a coconut pie hangover.

No longer, however, do we regard Hico as merely a pie stop with a little Billy the Kid museum around the corner (some people believe the gun-slinging bad boy finished his life here in anonymity). These days, we appreciate the Upstairs Inn as a place to recharge our batteries while exploring all that Hico offers.

Just about everything we need—from lodging to dining—is contained within a block-long radius.

In 2012, Upstairs Inn proprietor Jennifer Jones gave up her career as an accountant in Fort Worth to renovate the two-story limestone building at the corner of Pecan Street and Texas 6, discovering what she could about its past as the town's telephone operations headquarters. Within a year, she and her boyfriend, Wes Lunsford, delivered three spacious guest rooms on the upper floor, each with a private bath, offering equal doses of luxury and yesteryear grace. Exposed rock walls date to the building's beginnings in 1902, and gleaming wooden floors, antique furniture, and beds spread with fine linens make us wish our stay could last a week or so.

The shared common area between the trio of guest rooms is a large parlor with high ceilings that opens onto a breakfast room and a kitchenette

with a full-size vintage refrigerator. On one visit, a couple of women share one of the other rooms, and we politely swap greetings over morning coffee. Another visit, we have the whole place to ourselves.

Either way, my husband and I make good use of the fridge, stocking it with cheeses from nearby Veldhuizen and Eagle Mountain cheesemakers and Texas beers and wine that we purchase downstairs at Jennifer's Pecan Street Drink Shoppe. When we return from sightseeing, we relax with nibbles and sips while reading and writing travel-journal updates.

When browsing in the Drink Shoppe—pretty with its limestone walls and colorful posters by local artists—I'm always impressed with Jennifer's knack for creating an interesting inventory. Not only will you find Texas wines from Becker Vineyards, Brennan Vineyards, Wedding Oak Winery,



OUTLAW LORE

Did Billy the Kid live in Hico?

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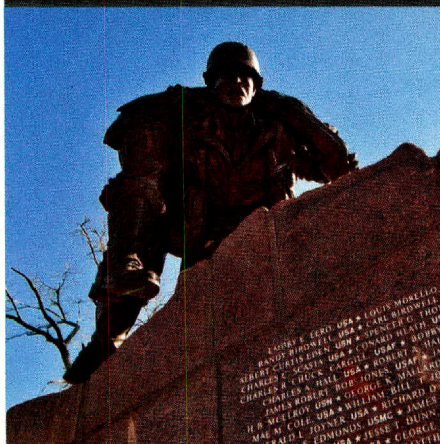
and Red Caboose Winery, but Jennifer stocks a fine selection of bottles from Europe and elsewhere in the United States, too. On Saturday afternoons, the Drink Shoppe offers tastings of wine and spirits from around Texas.

But during lunchtime hours, we're at Eis, the sandwich and sweets café Jennifer opened adjacent to the Drink Shoppe on the lower floor of the building. A particular recent lunch lingers in our memory, both for its deliciousness and its made-in-Texas pedigree: My choice, a combination of spicy pimento cheese and tomato jam from Weatherford's Fire Oak Grill on toasted bread from Sulak's Czech Bakery in Clifton, went well with a bowl of potato-green-chile

soup; while Marshall's Frito pie featured chili from the Texas Chili Company in Fort Worth and Eagle Mountain's Granbury Gold cheddar cheese. These we washed down with La La's Lemonade from Austin.

For patrons who appreciate Texas products, Eis pampers the palate with its corral of Lone Star edibles. Sandwiches come laden with meats from the Hill Country and North Texas, and frozen treats come from Mom & Pops in Austin and Henry's Homemade Ice Cream in Plano. Other desserts include gluten-free cookies and brownies from Sweet Texas in Liberty Hill (we love them not for virtuous reasons but because they're irresistible) and Texas rum cake, frosted sugar cookies, and whoopie pies from Rollin the Dough, a small commercial kitchen in nearby Stephenville that also makes brownies and cheesecakes. Between Eis and the Drink Shoppe, we find an easy task of

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outfitting an impressive picnic basket and souvenir stash for friends at home.

We'll typically walk off some of our indulgences by strolling around historic downtown Hico. On the last visit, we fell in love with bottle and wine openers fashioned from horseshoes and heavy, handmade wooden tables at a shop called Hill Country Dwellings.

Across the street, just past the 15-room historic Midland Hotel (currently in restoration), Sugar Moon Antiques won my interest with its stash of antique kitchen wares, including wooden spice boxes and pottery mixing bowls and pitchers.

Sweets seem to find us in Hico. Hico Popcorn Works, a couple of doors down

from Sugar Moon, lures us with its caramel popcorn aroma, warm and sweet in the air as we enter the shop. And Wiseman House Chocolates, found in a restored Victorian home just behind the Upstairs Inn, sells my favorite dark-chocolate toffee, as well as a varied collection of gifts and housewares. Wandering through the shop's succession of rooms, I find a mountain of tea towels and pillows I'd love for my home.

Back in our room, I'll unwind over coffee and a chocolate truffle, curled up in the chaise longue in the corner with a good book, while Marshall naps on the sumptuous bed. Eventually, we'll wander to the nearby towns of Walnut Springs or Glen Rose for supper, but we'll be back Upstairs as soon as we can for a Texas wine nightcap. Inevitably we dream about pie for breakfast at the Koffee Kup. ★

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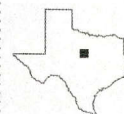
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The **Billy the Kid Museum** and **Hico Visitor Center** are at 114 N. Pecan St. Call 254/796-2523;
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Sugar Moon Antiques is at 101 S. Pecan St. Call 254/796-4155;
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Hill Country Dwellings is at 118 N. Pecan St. Call 817/739-3614.

Hico Popcorn Works is at 117 S. Pecan St. Call 254/796-4125;
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A Vintage Redux

MAGNOLIA AVENUE'S RENAISSANCE IN FORT WORTH

text by June Naylor

AT 6 P.M. ON A WEDNESDAY, I'm sitting with a good friend next to the cozy patio fireplace at Kent & Co. Wines. While gazing out at the foot traffic moving along Fort Worth's Magnolia Avenue, I'm savoring a glass of Frog's Leap cabernet sauvignon, a rare treat because a full bottle rarely falls within my budget. But at Kent & Co., I can indulge in one glass of something like this from a list of about 200 fabulous wines available by the glass at retail

WHAT A RACK!

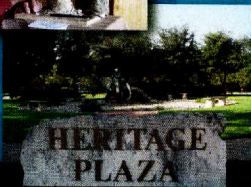
Kent & Co. Wines makes more than 200 wines available by the glass, plus beer, coffee, and primo people-watching.

prices. It's a beautiful complement to a charcuterie board of cured meats.

My pal says her Revolver Blood & Honey brew (made in Granbury), along with the brisket taco from the food truck outside, trumps my pairing. It doesn't matter who's right: We're just happy that our city offers an abundance of sipping options within a 12-block stretch of restored 1920s buildings. Not too long ago, the same thoroughfare offered little more than a dry cleaners, machine shops, doctor's



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A GRAND POUR
Grand Cru owner Karen Chu, shown here pouring a flight, moved her bar to Magnolia Avenue in 2014 to be part of the strip's lively vibe.

offices, and boarded-up service stations.

In the heart of Fort Worth, a renaissance of the Fairmount National Historic District—of which Magnolia Avenue is part—has transformed the avenue in recent years, delivering homegrown eating, drinking, and entertainment destinations that stay busy nearly every night of the week.

The brother-sister team of Will Churchill and Corrie Watson brought their innovative Kent & Co. concept to life by combining their passion for wine and their desire to expand customer service for their auto-dealership clientele. The two also run Frank Kent Cadillac, a longtime Fort Worth company that was founded by their great-grandfather. Customers can drop off their cars at Kent & Co. to have them serviced at the main shop across town (a free service for those purchasing their cars from Frank Kent, and available for a fee for everyone else), then enjoy a glass of wine before catching a ride home from the shuttle service.

Like us, a good many Kent & Co. patrons don't come for car needs. We appreciate the monthly car selection displayed on the lift in the middle of the bar—my personal favorite was the 1963, TCU-purple convertible Cadillac—but we're all about the socializing aspect. Neighbors are, as well, as evidenced by those joining us on the patio with their leashed dogs tagging along. Guests not imbibing have options, too: The bar offers coffee from Avoca Coffee Roasters, a business also found on Magnolia, and inventive non-alcoholic "mocktails" such as Cash's Lemonade, a mixture of fresh lemonade with muddled strawberries, fizzy Topo Chico, and a lemon slice.

We can always count on seeing real wine connoisseurs in the crowd, of course: Will and Corrie's wine cellar offers a selection of 300 different wines, with about 200 offered by the glass. California cabernet sauvignon and pinot noir figure prominently on the list, and

DRINK

there is good representation among Italian, French, Spanish, and Chilean wines, too. Demanding palates appreciate finding a 2004 Château Margaux among by-the-glass options. Guests who want something extra-special can ask sommelier Chester Cox for the “secret list,” which offers exclusive choices such as a bottle from Domaine de la Romanée-Conti, one of the most honored vineyards in Burgundy.

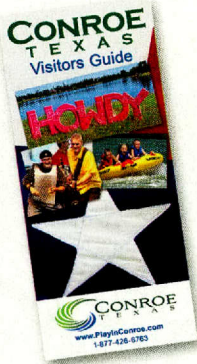
**Not too long ago,
the same thoroughfare
offered little more than
a dry cleaners, machine shops,
doctor’s offices, and
boarded-up service stations.**

When I’m after something a little more low-key than the usually buzzy Kent & Co., I’ll opt for a glass of wine instead at Grand Cru Wine Bar & Boutique, a few blocks away. I like a table next to one of the big picture windows overlooking the sidewalk or beside an exposed brick wall, burnished by the vanilla light washing over the room. On Tuesdays, when bottles are discounted 20 percent, I might opt for a bottle of bubbles; weekends usher in specially priced flights—such as reds from Washington or pinot noirs from Oregon. When it’s time to buy a gift, the bar’s shop provides plentiful bottles at retail pricing, as well as wine buckets, stemware, and decorative wine racks. My favorite accessory sold at Grand Cru is a Coravin, a high-tech tool (roughly \$300) that makes it possible to enjoy any wine by the glass; its thin “wine access” needle glides through the cork to allow pouring, then when the needle comes out, the cork reseals.

A few blocks west, Ellerbe Fine Foods—a charming bistro within a renovated 1920s gas station—remains my go-to for a glass of French rosé. It’s particularly compatible with chef Molly McCook’s cornmeal-crusted local okra,

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DRINK

served with a buttermilk-jalapeño dressing. Otherwise, I save up for one of Ellerbe's popular wine dinners, when co-owner Richard King brings in a California winemaker to lead a tasting of elegant wines paired with one of Molly's special menus. Among my favorite memories is the coupling of her butter-poached salmon served with spring



FIND MORE ONLINE

20 reasons to visit Fort Worth at texashighways.com/webextra.

peas and shaved radishes with a reserve 2009 chardonnay from the LangeTwins winery. One of Ellerbe's other great draws is its retail wine offering:

Anything that's on the wine list is available for take-away sale at a discount.

Across the street from Ellerbe, in a thoroughly remodeled 1920s bungalow, a place called The Bearded Lady honors the booming craft beer and hard cider scene with aplomb. I like the banquette window seats, a sunny spot for Saturday lunch, when a salad of greens topped with smoked salmon and avocado is a good foil for whatever cider is currently on tap. The front porch and back patio teem with happy crowds, particularly on weekends. No matter the season, beer enthusiasts gather at this Magnolia hot spot to enjoy choices from the list of 30 beers on tap and more than 200 in bottles or cans.

A little less than a mile east, on the eastern end of Magnolia Avenue, a cheerful lounge called Proper is where my husband and I like to unwind over—well, a proper cocktail. Proper's bartenders can whip up a perfect Manhattan, offer thoughtful opinions on single-malt whisky, and keep myriad beer orders straight, all at once. Trivia night happens every Monday, but when it's busy we often wander out back to the patio and settle near the firepit. Whether inside or out, we toast our good luck in having so many choices for relaxing along Magnolia Avenue. ★

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Spring Events The Museum hosts an array of unforgettable annual events. Visit our website for a complete calendar.

Easter Egg Hunt - April 4.

History in your Backyard - April 7.

Lenz Fest - April 16-18- *Luncheon and Style Show*, Apr. 16; *Cocktail Party*, Apr. 17; and *Garden Tour*, Apr. 18.

Founders Day - May 9.



Founders Day



Lenz Fest



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Ellerbe Fine Foods is at 1501

W. Magnolia Ave. Call 817/926-3663;
www.ellerbefinefoods.com.

The Bearded Lady is at 1229 7th Ave.

at Magnolia Ave. Call 817/349-9832.

Proper is at 409 W. Magnolia Ave.

Call 817/984-1133; www.propermagnolia.com.



The *Fancy Place* in Boyd

A HIDDEN PEARL PUTS WISE COUNTY ON THE FOODIE MAP

text by Jeffrey Wright

Inside, the décor is both whimsical and casual, reminiscent of a funky boardwalk diner.

IT CALLS ITSELF “THE FANCY PLACE IN BOYD,” BUT YOU wouldn’t know it to look at it, gritty as a Gulf oyster from the outside. If you pass by in the morning, a small sign declaring “Gogo Gumbo!” provides the only notice that foodieness is afoot in this town about a half-hour northwest of Fort Worth. But at dinnertime, it’s often a different story, with more than 100 eager patrons queued up for a table. Seasoned regulars bring folding chairs and coolers and dispense advice to first-time visitors enticed by the promise of quirky-yet-haute Cajun-Texas fusion cuisine.

The seafood-kitchen concept, hatched in 2008 by chef Kraig Thome, occupies a cramped century-old building on the town’s main drag behind a ramshackle facade, totally incongruous with the reputation Gogo Gumbo! has cultivated far beyond Wise County lines. Next door lives a business that does triple-duty



GOGO GUMBO!

is at 116 West Rock Island Ave. in Boyd.
Hours: Tue-Sat
4-9 p.m. BYOB.

Call 940/433-3474;
www.gogogumbo.com.



GO-TO FOR GUMBO

Shrimp-and-crab gumbo and chicken-and-sausage gumbo reign supreme on the menu, but diners also go nuts for Gogo's salads, catfish platters, and housemade desserts.

as a pizza parlor, movie rental site, and tanning salon.

Thome, who earned his fine-dining stripes through decades of experience in the private-club circuit in Houston, spent two years scouring locations across the state for a restaurant of his own, finally spying a Craigslist ad for a languishing catfish joint in Boyd. He and his wife, Letty, drove up from Houston and bought it on the spot. In the years since, he purchased neighboring properties to make room for expanded storage, a bakery, and Canteen, a soup-and-sandwich eatery a few doors down.

With booths, tables, and a long bar, Gogo Gumbo! seats only about 50 people, so weekend wait times can extend more than an hour—an issue that

became apparent within a few months of opening. “We never thought we’d do that many people,” says Thome, who brought in a paging system because customers were wandering away down the street and missing their table summons. “But it became obvious this wasn’t going to slow down.” One of the first regular diners protested upon finding a line for a table at 5 o’clock in the afternoon on a Friday. Handed a wait pager, the astonished local exclaimed, “Well, isn’t this the fancy place in Boyd?” And with that, Gogo! acquired its slogan.

Inside, the décor is both whimsical and casual, reminiscent of a funky coastal boardwalk diner, with a large mounted tuna on the back wall, oars for he/she restroom markers, campy Americana signage, and a few video

games. The room was once a movie theater, so the floor isn’t quite level; a marble dropped in the front will roll gradually toward the rear.

I learned of Gogo Gumbo! from my friend Mike Ballard, a resident of Azle, in adjacent Tarrant County. We eventually made plans to meet for dinner. “On a previous visit, my wife Jeannie had the catfish dinner, and she said it was the best she had ever eaten, and that is saying something,” Ballard told me. “We love catfish and eat it every place we try.”

I’m a vegetarian, so my options were somewhat limited; I enjoyed an appetizer of lightly battered tempura green beans and the house salad with lightly spiced pecans, tangy dried cranberries, and crumbled feta cheese scattered on a bed

of fresh baby greens. Mike, meanwhile, enthused over his “crabby mushrooms” appetizer and declared the chicken-sausage gumbo excellent, but somehow still a letdown compared to the seafood gumbo he had eaten there previously.

Tell that to Las Colinas resident Jeff Kunkel, who makes the hour-long drive to Boyd at least monthly, usually with a group of the uninitiated. “Chicken-sausage gumbo is one of Thome’s best dishes,” he says. “The dark mahogany roux is the perfect foundation ... you taste the flour and oil mix up front, and then it hits you with a smoky taste, perfectly complemented with blackened chicken and vegetables. Your mouth just waters.”

Kunkel, who played shortstop for the Texas Rangers in the '80s, is a frequent student at the cooking classes that Thome conducts, which sell out immediately. “Playing professional baseball, you meet exceptional people who have

an amazing drive and passion for what they do. Chef Thome is one of those.”

All dishes, including desserts, are prepared by a kitchen staff that scrambles to make all orders from scratch under strict time limits. They have no heat lamps, and there is no walk-in freezer. The menu changes weekly with six to eight featured entrées. Varieties of gumbo justify the namesake, but the Cajun genre is just one of myriad cuisines that creep into the mix. Staples such as seafood hush puppies and blackened shrimp accompany items like lobster mac-and-cheese, andouille-stuffed quail, tempura green beans, brisket tacos, crab chile relleno, and goat cheese salad. At Canteen, which shares the kitchen but maintains a separate daily menu, club and chicken-salad sandwiches are offered alongside more exotic fare like Vietnamese *banh mi* or pretzel Reubens.

Seafood may be the bait, but the des-

serts have won a following, too. More than half of diners order something sweet to follow the meal, and many patrons order pies to go. Our table shared the stacked Jack Daniels mousse pie, which had a whisper of whisky and a fluffy chocolate-cream filling. By far, though, the most popular dessert is the 2die4, a cream-cheese mousse topped with assorted berries, ladyfingers, and almond cookies.

Thome and crew feed around 1,300 people per week, nearly equivalent to the entire population of Boyd. On Friday and Saturday, 80 percent of diners funnel in from points across the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex or beyond. Now, with outsiders thronging Gogo!, residents of Boyd have grown to appreciate the pagers. When the weather’s nice, the sidewalk outside becomes a convivial gathering space, with locals and visitors getting to know each other in an impromptu tailgate party. ★

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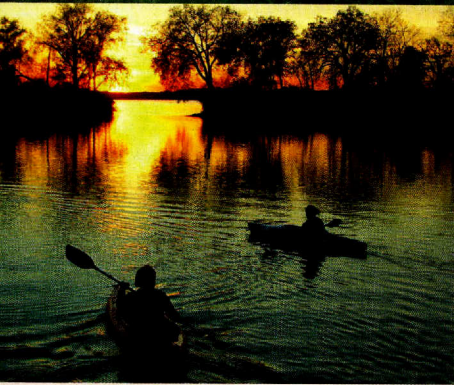


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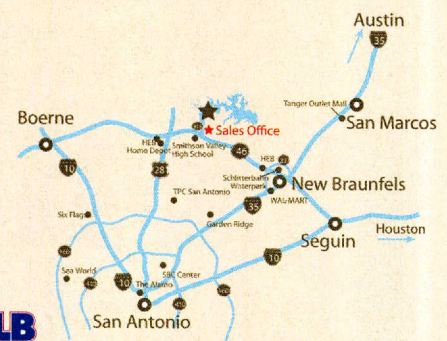
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Next Weekend

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Urban Spark

THE REVIVAL OF DOWNTOWN HOUSTON
AS THE CITY'S PLAYGROUND

text by JUNE NAYLOR



THE PASTRY WAR


*The Pastry War
inspires guests with
craft margaritas like
the habanero-serrano
on the rocks and the
strawberry frozen.*

WELCOME RECEPTION

Opened last November, the JW Marriott Houston Downtown occupies a renovated downtown high-rise.



The DISTANCE to HOUSTON →

	Fort Worth 260 miles; 3.75 hours	Paris 300 miles; 4.75 hours	Abilene 350 miles; 5.5 hours	Kerrville 260 miles; 3.75 hours	McAllen 350 miles; 5.5 hours
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VISITING MY HOUSTON COUSINS a few years ago, I joined them for a late-afternoon trip downtown to sip wine at La Carafe, perhaps the oldest bar in the city. Listening to Edith Piaf and Hank Williams tunes wafting from the jukebox, we marveled that the 155-year-old building, with its dark and cozy corners, could survive in a world devoted to all things new and shiny. As we walked back outside to head home, I thought it a shame that there was little else to bring folks downtown for some fun.

That wistfulness has disappeared today, as downtown Houston explodes with reasons to spend a weekend roaming around the city center. No longer a place frequented only by conventioners or workers employed in the cluster of high-rises, downtown Houston has become a destination for much



HOUSTON

The Houston Visitors Center opens 9-4 daily except Sundays on the first floor of Houston City Hall, 901 Bagby St. For maps and other travel information, call the Greater Houston Convention & Visitors Bureau at 800/446-8786; www.visit-houstontexas.com.

more than the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts, the Alley Theatre, and the popular Downtown Aquarium. Forgotten corners and dilapidated buildings fade into lazy memories as old structures with viable bones get new life, and new high-rises take shape.

"I never would have believed how much fun it is to live downtown now," remarked a friend of mine who recently moved into a left in a beautifully renovated early 1900s building. "Everything I want to do is in walking distance."

So what is there for all these new downtowners and visitors to do? Plenty. My recent weekend in downtown Houston revealed vibrant throngs attracted

to popular new places for eating, drinking, and relaxing. I found plenty of out-of-town visitors in my midst, as well as Houstonians enjoying the ease of hopping on Metro Rail Houston for the quick light-rail trip into the central business district for an afternoon or evening of play. Some, I noticed, arrived downtown via the newly renovated Buffalo Bayou hike-and-bike trails, or explored the area on Segway tours.

To better appreciate how threads of old Houston weave into the tapestry of the city's contemporary heart, I found a pair of worthy sites in the northwest corner of downtown, just two blocks south of the Hobby Center. Situated between Sam Houston Park and Hermann Square, the beautifully restored 1926 Julia Ideson Building houses the Houston Metropolitan Research Center's extensive collection of historic maps, photos, and other records; a reading room; event space; and rotating history

exhibits. Across the street, The Heritage Society at Sam Houston Park displays 10 historical structures dating from 1823 to 1905 across 10 verdant acres, offering a window to Houston's history.

My recent weekend in downtown Houston revealed vibrant throngs attracted to popular new places for eating, drinking, and relaxing.

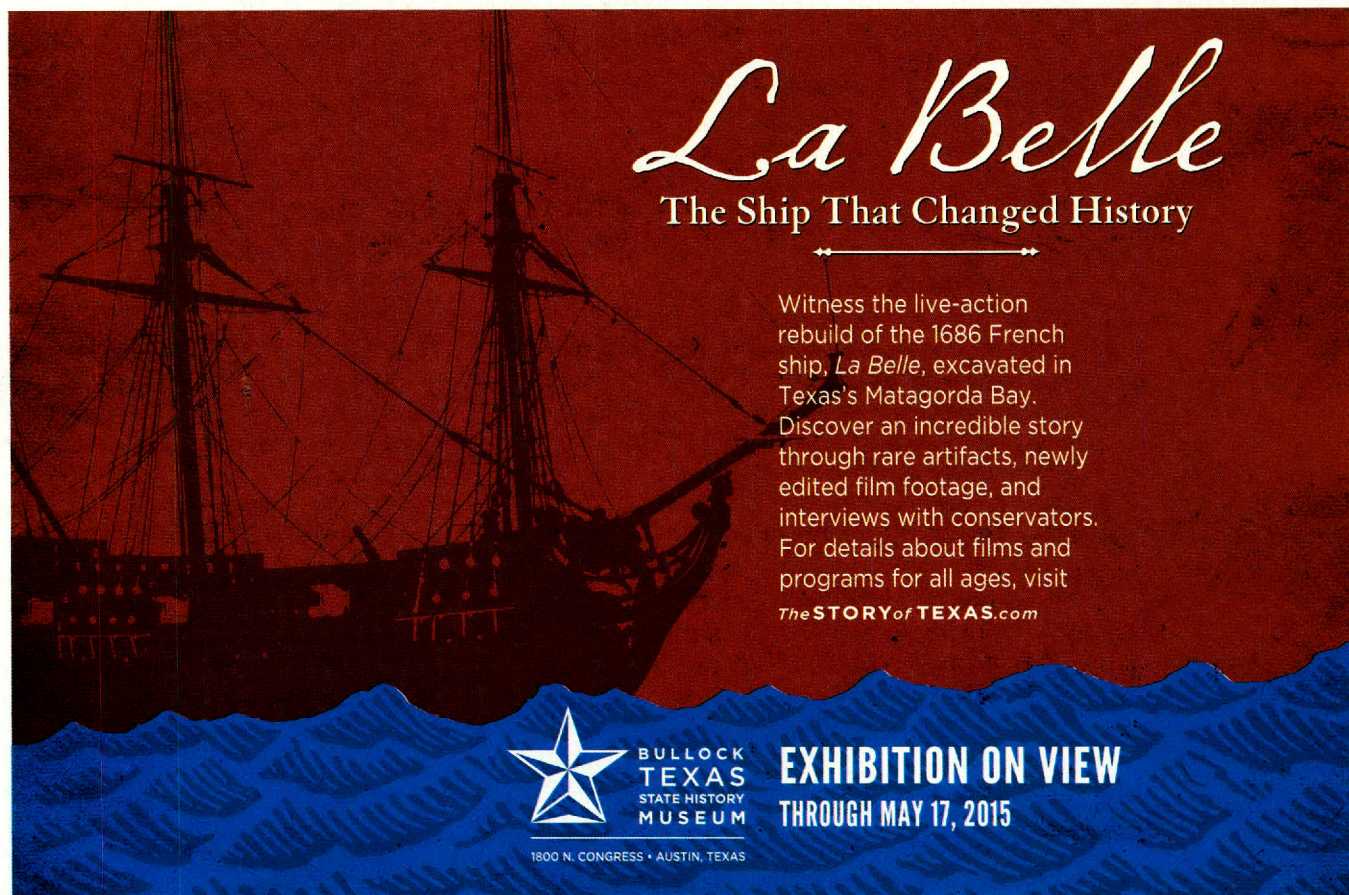
My weekend was filled also with a wealth of gustatory pleasures, all of which mentioned here can be reached by foot within a one-mile journey in downtown, moving north to south.

At the corner of Main Street and Congress Avenue, I found a spot worthy of a long linger over breakfast—and again at lunch. Sitting just across the street from the handsome and recently

restored Hotel Icon, The Honeymoon Café & Bar answers a need for anyone jonesing for great coffee, food, and wine. There's a distinct Parisian bistro feel in the tile floors and café tables and chairs, as well as its smartly dressed crowd. Serving java roasted nearby at Boomtown Coffee, this corner spot persuaded me to nurse another cappuccino while watching the sidewalk traffic from my window seat, long after I finished my BLT croissant topped by a sunny-side-up egg.

Another day, I returned to The Honeymoon for lunch with a friend. Chef Amanda McGraw's fried chicken-liver po'boy sandwich, garnished with green tomato-onion jam and rainbow chard, won me over, as did my companion's smoked salmon sandwich with chèvre and tarragon aioli. The Honeymoon keeps late hours for the cocktail crowd, too.


A few doors down from The Hon-



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The Honeymoon Café & Bar

Forgotten corners and dilapidated buildings fade into hazy memories as old structures with viable bones get new life, and new high-rises take shape.

eymoon, The Pastry War casually combines style and theme. Inspired by an 1838 Mexican-French fracas that took place in Mexico long before the Battle of Puebla, Houston cocktail bar genius Bobby Heugel partners with Alba Huerta to infuse French sensibilities throughout their Mexican saloon. Heugel, whose Anvil Bar and Refuge in Houston's Montrose area has earned national accolades, and Huerta describe Pastry War as a "mezcaleria," serving spirits the two have curated on visits to Mexico. My husband Marshall and I savored the handmade margaritas—my favorite is the strawberry-balsamic version, while his is the habanero-serano—and a game of pool, which became livelier as the evening wore on.

Four blocks south, Springbok introduced us to a South African rugby pub experience. While I expected a boisterous and burly crowd, the surprise came in a darkish but dignified and inviting space within yet another historic building. Marshall and I pulled up high

stools at the bar for a chat with the bartender, who steered us to a refreshing shandy, a blend of beer with lemonade and bitters.

South African native Peter Walker named the restaurant and bar for the national rugby team of his homeland and included rugby jerseys and trophies of springboks (similar to antelopes) and wildebeest in his décor. We liked chef Seth Greenburg's interpretation of South African dishes, especially the *boerevors*, a spicy beef-pork belly sausage that's grilled and presented topped with beer-braised onion and pickled carrots on a large roll smeared with whiskey mustard. That, we decided, was fit for a rugby player after a rough match. Upstairs, the lounge offers soft leather sofas and a pool table, plus a fabulous balcony overlooking Main Street.

A quick block down Main Street, the elegant new JW Marriott Houston Downtown provided us with a couple of luxurious, restful nights of sleep. Occupying a vintage skyscraper

that sat mostly empty for a long while, the building was renovated extensively but retains its stately character, as seen in exposed steel pillars on all 22 floors. My favorite aspect was the spacious bathroom, complete with an enormous tub with a window view of downtown.

Throughout the JW, I admired a wealth of local artwork, the most magnificent of which is a rendition of the JW's signature griffin. The 1,500-pound bronze mythical creature by Dallas sculptor Brad Oldham keeps a regal watch over the lobby living room and adjacent restaurant. That restaurant, called the Main Kitchen, flourishes under expert guidance from chef Erin Smith. Among the flavorful treats on her breakfast menu were the gluten-free carrot pancakes, served with yogurt and purslane salad; and blackened Gulf shrimp over cheese grits, the latter sourced from the Homestead Gristmill near Waco.

After wandering through the

Discovery Green Flea, the wonderful outdoor market that takes place the third Saturday of each month at Discovery Green, the 12-acre park adjacent to the George R. Brown Convention Center, we walked over to Reserve 101 for a late-afternoon cocktail. We got a kick looking at the sizable collection of domestic and imported whiskey amassed by proprietors Mike Raymond and Steve Long, who have developed a devoted clientele that loves their elixirs. While my husband and I aren't connoisseurs able to afford the \$750 shot of Glenmorangie Pride 1978 that Raymond brought in from Scotland, we nevertheless enjoyed hearing about the visits from famous guests, such as Sean Penn and Charles Barkley. And we found a \$30 treat: Raymond's silky-smooth house special, a bourbon barrel-aged Manhattan, aged on-site for six months.

Before leaving Houston for home, we vowed to return to its downtown as often as possible to enjoy some of the places yet to open. You can bet that when we do, we'll set aside a leisurely morning for coffee at the Honeymoon, watching—and envying—those happy downtown denizens in their burgeoning new environs. ★

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text by **MELISSA GASKILL**

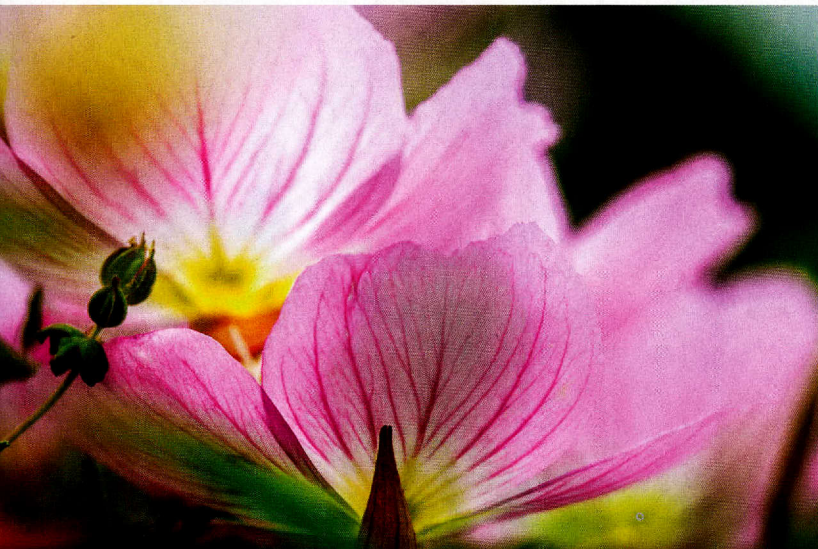
Nothing says spring

in Texas like bluebonnets, paintbrushes, and other familiar wildflowers. Some years these blooms merely whisper the season's arrival, their voices muted by drought or unseasonal temperatures, but other times they trumpet the news with great swaths of vivid color as far as the eye can see.

This spring promises to be closer to a shout than a whisper, but either way there will be wildflowers somewhere, sometime. Nature is nothing if not resilient and, this being Texas, she seems capable of handling more than we might expect. In our annual wildflower drive article, we endeavor to send you places where you'll see the beauty of wildflowers and find plenty of other diversions to make for a great trip. We also try to cover parts of the state you might not think of when it comes to wildflowers and where you may sometimes have to work a bit harder for that photo-worthy payoff.

That said, we encourage you to enjoy our state's better-known, tried-and-true wildflower locations—Brenham and Chappell Hill in Washington County; the Hill Country from Austin to Fredericksburg to the Highland Lakes, Llano, Burnet, Bandera, and beyond; East Texas around Ennis, Athens, and Tyler; and upper South Texas. But you don't have to stop there.

Here are four drives to lesser-known places with great potential for beautiful photographs and wonderful memories. »



Previous spread:
Plantains blend with spring blooms at Prairie Mountain, Llano County.
Left: Pink evening primroses sweeten Terry Hershey Park in Houston.

To order a print of the primrose photograph, call 866/962-1191, or visit www.texashighwaysprints.com.

PHOTO: © Theresa DiMenno



Texas bluebonnets envelop Ellis County.

PHOTO: © Laura Vu





*Goat-foot morning
glories creep
toward the sea
on Padre Island.*



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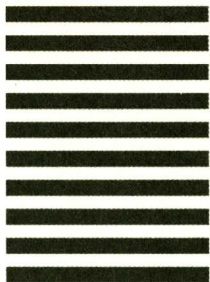
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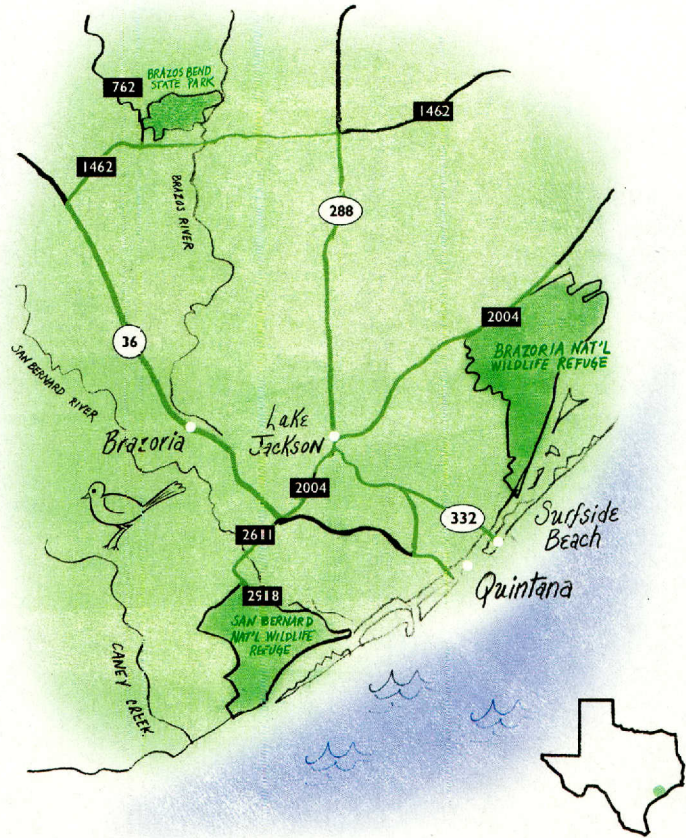
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Brazosport Area

After a hearty breakfast at Asiel's Restaurant in Lake Jackson (famous for donut burgers and bacon nights), head northeast on FM 2004 to Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge, where a driving tour serves up sedges, rushes, and cattails along with evening primrose, coreopsis, paintbrush, Indian blanket, and spider and rain lilies. The Discovery Center's walking path offers a close look at spiderworts and water lilies.

Return to Lake Jackson on FM 2004, passing coreopsis and coralbean, then take Texas 288 north, then FM 1462 west and FM 762 north to Brazos Bend State Park for an astonishing variety of wildflowers: ten petal anemone, Texas frogfruit, coreopsis, Mexican hat, plains wild indigo, wine cup, and showy primrose. Park interpreter Sharon Hanzik says spectacular spider lilies are found in wet areas at the west end of the park and irises in swampy areas on Hale Lake Road.

Continue on 1462 and take Texas 36 south through Brazoria, then FM 2611 to the San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge. Irises and water lilies bloom along the Bobcat Woods walking trail (come prepared for mosquitoes!) and the three-mile Moccasin Pond driving trail, part of a 9.4-mile driving tour of the refuge.

Midway between the two refuges just a couple of blocks off FM 2004 in Lake Jackson, the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory harbors anemone, coneflower, coral honeysuckle, curly clematis, and narrowleaf sunflower. On the Observatory's coastal property, next to the town hall in Quintana, find bluebonnet, coralbean, gaillardia, lantana, spotted beebalm, and more. Volunteers staff that site in April to help visitors locate migrating song birds and will also help identify wildflowers.

If you want to linger, Quintana Beach County Park rents cabins with views of the beach and wildflowers such as coreopsis and lantana in the brush-covered dunes. Nearby in Surfside, the Red Snapper Inn serves a variety of dishes made with snapper that were swimming in the Gulf mere hours before.

More Info:

Brazosport Convention & Visitors Council, 979/285-2501; www.visitbrazosport.com.

Mid-Coast National Wildlife Refuges, 979/964-4011; www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges/texas/texasmidcoast/index.htm.

Brazoria County Parks, 979/864-1541 (979/233-1461 for Quintana Beach); www.brazoria-county.com/parks.





Fort Davis/Alpine

You won't find many of the usual spring suspects here, but the Fort Davis area offers unusual species and incredible scenery overall, and wildflowers really pop during the rains of late summer. Start in Fort Davis with its 75-mile scenic loop, heading west on Texas 118 toward McDonald Observatory. Stop in at Davis Mountains State Park to see scarlet bouvardia, littleleaf leadtree, trompillo, sumac, Apache plume, tree cholla, Torrey yucca, catclaw acacia, and agarita on the park's scenic driving loop or 12 miles of hiking trails.

Back on Texas 118, Havard agave become abundant as you wind higher. At the Lawrence E. Wood roadside park, access the Nature Conservancy Davis Mountains Preserve's 2.5-mile Madera Canyon Trail. The Davis Mountains are a "sky island" 5,000 feet above the Chihuahuan Desert, populated by distinctive plants and animals. The region features rare plants, including the Livermore sandwort.

From Texas 118, turn left on Texas 166. Look for agaves, beargrass, and purple feather dalea and catch magnificent views of Sawtooth Mountain. The landscape drops and grows more arid, with ocotillos, evergreen sumac, agarita, and yuccas. Point of Rocks picnic area abuts an enormous pile of rocks dotted with Mexican buckeye, flameleaf sumac, and scarlet bouvardia. At Texas 17, turn right toward Marfa, through the Marfa grasslands and past Paisano Peak, center of a large volcanic caldera. From Marfa take US 67/90 over to Alpine. You'll pass the viewing area for the famous Marfa Lights; if you want to try your luck, spend the night at Alpine's stylish Maverick Inn motor court or another of the area's storied lodgings.

Take Texas 118 northwest back to Fort Davis, motoring through grasslands where you may spy yellow bladderpods, white-flowered peppergrass, and purple verbena, says Patricia Manning, who until her recent retirement ran the greenhouses for the Biology Department at Sul Ross State University. Later, when it's mealtime, try a juicy half-pound burger at Fort Davis Drug Store's old-fashioned soda counter, or a panini at the Hotel Limpia's Blue Mountain Bistro, which serves fine cuisine like beef Bourguignon for dinner. Bunk at the historic Limpia, Western-themed Harvard Hotel, or circa-1935 restored Stone Village Tourist Camp, all right in town.

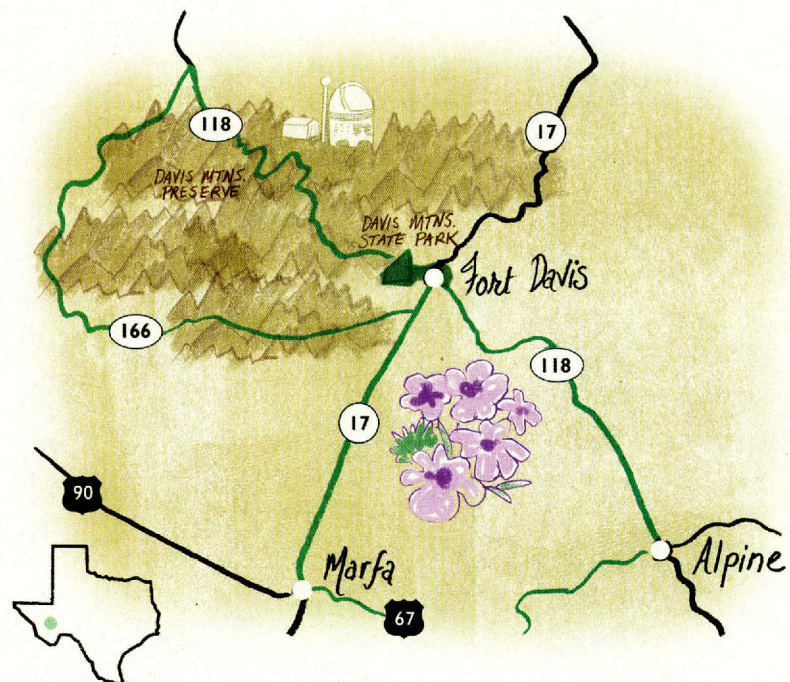
More Info:

Fort Davis Chamber of Commerce.
800/524-3015; www.fortdavis.com.

Davis Mountains State Park.
432/426-3337; www.tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/davis-mountains.

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A splash of
strawberry
cactus.
Devils River.



*A least skipper
butterfly lights
on bull thistle.*





Pointed phlox in the spotlight at Fennessey Ranch, Refugio County.



Flourishing purple coneflower in Austin.



*The leaves of lemon
beebalm (shown
here in Dripping
Springs) have
a citrusy scent.*

To order a print of this photograph, call 866/962-1191, or visit www.texashighwaysprints.com.

Bastrop Area

The September 2011 fire that devastated Bastrop State Park's loblolly pines created open space for wildflowers, and botanist Bill Carr says the park's bounty last year included red firewheel, spotted horsemint, Carolina larkspur, yellow primroses, lazy daisies, Drummond's phlox, sensitive briar, and Georgia rockrose. Open areas also hold plants unique to Texas such as Brazos-mint, stemless spiderwort, broadleaf snakecotton, and sandyland bluebonnets, the same genus but a separate species from the well-known Texas bluebonnet. Drive Park Road 1A and stop at the scenic overlook at the highest point in the park for nice views and several trails to explore. Park Road 1C, stretching 10 miles between Bastrop and Buescher state parks, is experiencing post-burn natural re-vegetation and offers many wildflowers. Carr expects a good season thanks to fall rains. Ranger-guided hikes to new park property containing sandy meadows offer the best wildflower viewing.

Around Bastrop, look for maroon blanket flower or Indian blanket, a plant adapted to this sandy soil, as well as tall prairie larkspur, brilliant annual phlox, bright cowpen daisies, and Indian paintbrushes. Stay at the park's CCC-built cabins or campgrounds to see wildflowers at their best in early-morning light.

Just outside the park on Texas 21, enjoy spring weather and a thick, juicy burger on the deck at Roadhouse restaurant, which also serves salads, steaks, and chicken sandwiches.

West of town, explore the Lower Colorado River Authority's McKinney Roughs Nature Park on 18 miles of hiking and equestrian trails. Park naturalist Nicholas Cowey says that on Buckeye, Roadrunner, and Pecan Bottom trails, you'll find delicate baby blue eyes, Turk's cap, and showy rusty blackhaw trees. Open fields along the Ridge, Bluff, and Pine Ridge trails contain coreopsis, Mexican hats, brown-eyed Susan, and blue curls. South of the overflow parking lot, bizarre-looking swanflower blooms and patches of sandyland bluebonnets brighten the south side of Bobcat Ridge Trail. There's no need to walk far to see wildflowers in the gardens near the visitor's center.

Along area roads, coreopsis, black-eyed Susans, phlox, Indian paintbrush, and bluebonnets abound. Find more sandyland bluebonnets by taking Texas 21 west of town; turn on County Road 81, which turns into County Road 82 (Shiloh Road), Cowey's favorite spot.

Extend your wildflower watching by staying overnight at Hyatt Regency Lost Pines Resort & Spa, adjacent to McKinney Roughs (and connected via trails), or in town.

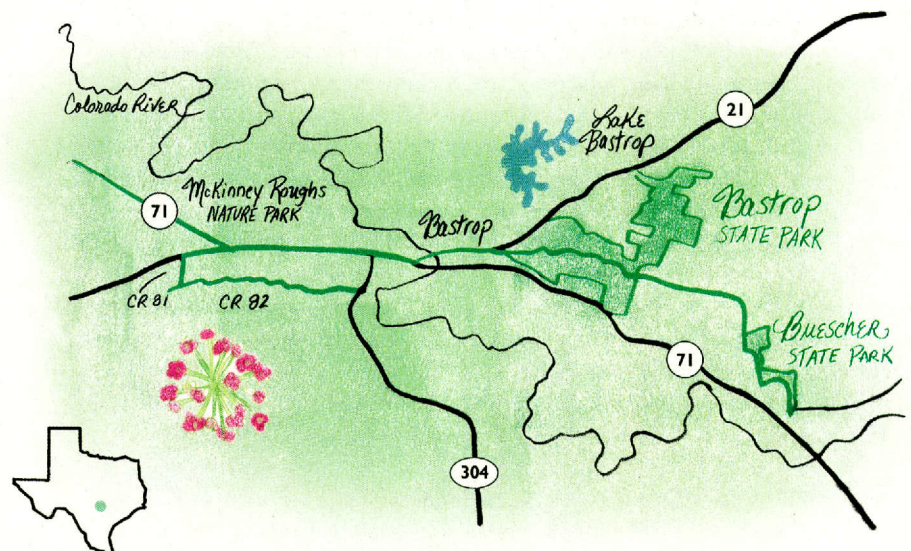
More Info:

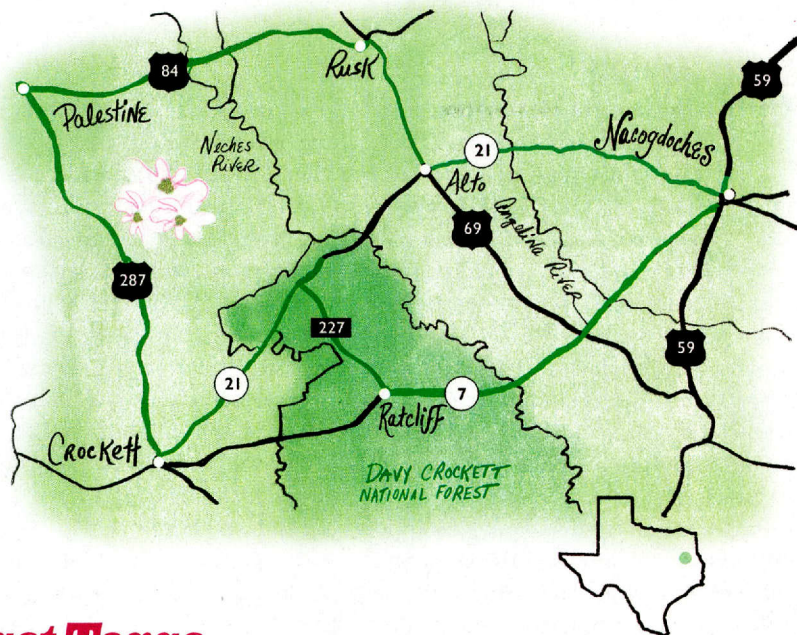
Museum & Visitor Center
(Bastrop). 512/303-0904;
www.visitbastroptx.com.

Bastrop State Park. 512/321-2101;

www.tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/bastrop.

McKinney Roughs Nature Park,
512/303-5073; www.lcra.org/parks/developed-parks/pages/mckinney-roughs-nature-park.aspx.





East Texas

Start this drive in Nacogdoches on the north end of Stephen F. Austin State University's campus at its 42-acre Pineywoods Native Plant Center, home to a variety of trees and rare and endangered natives such as Neches River rose mallow, Winkler's white firewheel, and Texas trailing phlox. More than 100 species inhabit The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Demonstration Garden, including prairie flowers like gayfeather, bush pea, goldenrod, and coneflowers. The Center's two miles of trails are wheelchair accessible.

For lunch or dinner, stop at Auntie Pasta's restaurant, housed in what was the first refrigerated warehouse west of the Mississippi. Choose from gourmet pizzas, 10-layer lasagna baked daily (go early before it's gone!), and other traditional Italian dishes and desserts, as well as sandwiches and salads.

Take Texas 7 southwest toward Crockett through the Davy Crockett National Forest. At Ratcliff, turn right onto FM 227 (possible closures this spring due to bridge construction), which is covered in wildflowers in good years, according to U.S. Forest Service officials. When FM 227 hits Texas 21, turn right and after about six miles look for Forest Road 511. This will take you to FR 511-A, a short unpaved road to the Neches Bluff Overlook, at the northern end of the 20-mile 4C Trail. Take a short walk on the trail to see hairy-jointed meadow parsnip and common East Texas wildflowers.

Return to Texas 21 and head southwest to Crockett, then turn north on US 287 toward Palestine. On Dogwood Trails weekends—March 20-22 and 27-29, and April 3-5 this year—enjoy a variety of activities revolving around viewing the long-lasting, showy white blooms in 200-acre Davey Dogwood Park and surrounding area.

From Palestine, take US 84 east toward Rusk, stopping at Maydelle Country Wines on County Road 2108 to taste wines made from blackberries, grapefruits, and peaches as well as locally grown grapes—and root beer for the kids. Follow US 69 south to Alto, where you catch Texas 21 back to Nacogdoches. Along these roads you'll find bluebonnets, paintbrushes, dogwoods, swamp sunflowers, wine cups, Indian blankets, wisteria, and redbuds.

Stay in the main lodge or cabins scattered on pine-covered hills at Pine Creek Country Inn, 10 miles west of Nacogdoches on FM 2782. ★

Texas writer Melissa Gaskill enjoys finding wildflowers in unexpected and unusual places, but says she'll never tire of tried-and-true fields of bluebonnets. Our thanks to Joe Marcus, collections manager at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin, for his help with identifying the wildflowers pictured in this story.

More Info:
Nacogdoches Convention & Visitors Bureau, 888/653-3788; www.visitnacogdoches.org.
Davy Crockett National Forest, 936/655-2299; www.fs.usda.gov.
Palestine Visitor Center, 903/723-3014; www.visitpalestine.com.



*Phlox dominate
this spring mix
near Industry.*

To order a print of this photograph, call 866/962-1191, or visit www.texashighwaysprints.com.



Cattle avoid Texas bluebonnets (like these off Mach Road near Ennis), and go for the grass.

To order a print of this photograph, call 866/962-1191, or visit www.texashighwaysprints.com.

PHOTO: © Srin Sundarajan



Hold for Wildflowers!

Lady Bird Johnson,

champion of roadside beautification, once wrote, "Each year I try to save spring for wild flowers and me, circling my calendar late March and April and May and writing firmly across, "Hold for wild flower season."

And these days, there's no better place to celebrate spring than at

**The University of Texas at Austin
Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center.**

From April 25 through May 31, the center's McDermott Learning Center will feature *The Spectacular Wow!*, a *Texas Highways* photo exhibit showcasing the springtime images in this issue along with highlights from previous years.

Budding photographers, stay tuned to

www.texashighways.com

and our Facebook page for details on a **wildflower-photography portfolio review** with

Texas Highways Photography Editor Brandon Jakobeit, Theresa DiMenno, Laura Vu, and other

Texas Highways contributors, to take place the afternoon of April 25.

Save the date for other spring events during the

Wildflower Center's **Wildflower Days** (March 16-May 31), including exhibits of Shou Ping's paper sculptures and Roger Foster's limestone "oculars" (through May 31); the

Artists & Artisans Festival March 21-22; and the **Spring Native Plant Sale** April 11-12.

In addition to special events, visitors can photograph and learn about native plants in the display gardens, explore 3 miles of trails, and play in the Family Garden.

Call 512/232-0100; www.wildflower.org.

And for details about this year's **wildflower photo contest**, go to www.wildflower.org/photocontest.



Lockhart Smokehouse



**THE DALLAS
BAR·B·QUE
RENAISSANCE**



**DAYS OF PLENTY FOR
BARBECUE-LOVERS
IN BIG D**



**TEXT BY JOHN LUMPKIN
PHOTOGRAPHS BY WILL VAN OVERBEEK**



Dallas

is well known as the home of innovative chefs like Stephan Pyles and Dean Fearing, landmark restaurants like the Mansion, and a culinary climate of innovation that goes back to the days of the famed Helen Corbitt at Neiman Marcus' Zodiac Room. In recent years, a proliferation of creative chefs has enhanced Dallas' reputation as both proving ground and dining destination for everything from contemporary Italian cuisine to ramen and imaginative chocolates.

BUT TEXAS BARBECUE? NOT AS MUCH.

That is, at least, until the arrival of a new wave of pit masters and entrepreneurs who revere wood, smoke, and tradition. The hallmarks of this new wave reflect the best of Texas barbecue: Brisket is king, smoked on site in massive, wood-fired pits for 12 or more hours, creating a smoky aroma and tantalizing crunchy bark. The meats are seasoned with dry rubs, sometimes complex though not exotic, and always comforting. The meaty and moist ribs practically melt in your mouth, requiring napkins, but no sauce. The savory sausages are stuffed in taut casings that when cut, offer an audible snap and juicy interior. And, the fan base is devoted, willing to wait in line rather than miss out on the day's limited batch of smoked meats.

The vanguard of the new crop of traditional, wood-smoked purists is Pecan Lodge, a wildly popular enterprise that opened in the Dallas Farmers Market in 2010 and moved to Deep Ellum last year. Others followed: Lockhart Smokehouse in the Bishop Arts District and Plano, The Slow Bone adjacent to downtown, and most recently, Ten 50 BBQ in Richardson.

"You can't swing a dead cat without hitting a good barbecue joint in Austin," says Jack Perkins, who opened The Slow Bone in 2013. "We thought Dallas was underserved. This is a renaissance, absolutely."

Dallas wasn't a barbecue wasteland before Pecan Lodge. The late "Sonny" Bryan Jr. began smoking his signature ribs in 1958 near Parkland Hospital; business executives and blue-collar workers still crowd into vintage school-desk seats there. Near the original Sonny's, Mike Anderson's BBQ House, founded in 1982, packs in lunchtime diners. Odom's Bar-B-Cue,

a family business since the 1930s, draws customers and accolades at its two locations in West Dallas and Duncanville. And in 2008, Dwight Harvey, a South Dallas backyard cook, retired from a 38-year career in finance at Frito-Lay and opened Off the Bone Barbeque in the shadow of downtown, drawing fans for his signature baby-back ribs—and proving, Perkins says, that a neophyte restaurateur could be successful with traditional barbecuing techniques.

Still, "there would be no barbecue renaissance here without Pecan Lodge," says Gary Jacobson, spiritual leader of the "Texas BBQ Posse," a small group of aficionados who have been blogging about barbecue in Texas since 2010. In 2011, the Posse spent a day at Lockhart's, Pecan Lodge, and Meshack's, a simple take-out stand in Garland that opened in 2009. At the end of the outing, Jacobson declared: "One conclusion is clear: Big D is raising its game."

Pecan Lodge's place in the limelight began in September 2010, when Justin Fourton's ribs won first place at the inaugural Blues, Bandits, and BBQ festival in Dallas' Oak Cliff neighborhood. Justin says he retired from competition right then, joking recently that he will forever be undefeated. "It was the first time we had done anything like that," he said, recalling his surprise. "We were surrounded by all those barbecue experts."

The Fourtons' narrative is remarkable, but it's not the only one with a personal touch in the Dallas barbecue revival. The restaurants' stories make a Dallas barbecue tour more entertaining, as well as delicious.



Lockhart Smokehouse
owners Tim McLaughlin,
Jill Bergus, and Jeff Bergus



PECAN LODGE

Refugees from jobs in management consulting, Justin and Diane Fourton concede they were ingénues when they started selling brisket sandwiches in a Jiffy Lube parking lot in 2009. Still, their dream was catering Southern comfort food, including fried chicken inspired by Diane's grandmother's recipe.

They found what they thought would be a sustainable base in Shed No. 2 at the Dallas Farmer's Market the next year. By 2012, The Food Network visited and the stand's popularity swelled. Then, the city sold the Farmer's Market to private investors in 2013, prompting Pecan Lodge to move to Deep Ellum.

Moistness and smokiness are the goal for Pecan Lodge's top attractions—brisket, spare ribs, and homemade sausage. But the restaurant also serves alternative dishes, including fried chicken and the "Hot Mess," a sweet potato stuffed

with barbacoa, chipotle cream, cheese, and green onions. Another hit is the beef rib—blackened tender meat on a hefty bone that weighs more than a pound. (Tip: The beef rib has a cult following, and often sells out within 45 minutes of opening.)

Pecan Lodge, named for a casita on a ranch near Abilene once owned by Justin's late grandfather, added a dining room and bar service with its move to Deep Ellum. "Wine is a natural with brisket," says Diane, who's also the inspiration for a personalized craft beer—Four Corners Brewing Co.'s "Boss Lady Rustic Red."

LOCKHART SMOKEHOUSE

The inspiration for Lockhart Smokehouse is implied by its name—the Central Texas barbecue capital of Lockhart, home to Kreuz Market, Black's Barbecue, and Smitty's Market. Owner Jill Bergus' grandfather was Edgar "Pappa" Schmidt, who operated Kreuz (pronounced "Krites") from 1948 until the 1980s. Copying Kreuz, Jill and her husband Jeff tried not providing forks. True, the 8-inch spare ribs can be

eaten with fingers, but the Dallas market was a bit more fastidious about the brisket. There are now forks.

Lockhart Smokehouse has preserved the Kreuz tradition of displaying the cooked meats in full view for customers as they order, with servings priced by the pound. "Your eyes get to eat before your stomach does," Jill notes. The fatty beef exemplifies the "slow and low" cooking method—slow cooking and low heat. The pit masters smoke the brisket for 12 to 18

hours using post oak, pulling it only when it demonstrates the "jiggle," the subtle shivering of the whole slab when poked. Lockhart also offers non-barbecue alternatives as specials. "We're as old school as we can make it," says Jill, "but we like to keep it fresh with different ideas." Examples


include smoked salmon, double chile-rubbed pork tenderloin, and "Holy Cow Jalapeño Bacon Mac 'n Cheese," which show the influence of partner Tim McLaughlin, a classically trained chef turned barbecue maestro.

THE SLOW BONE

The Slow Bone is on the edge of Dallas' Design District, a collection of warehouses sprinkled with galleries, eateries, and boutiques near the sweeping Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge. Owner Jack Perkins calls it "the barbecue side of the tracks."

Along with his brisket, sausage, and pork ribs, Perkins, who also owns the popular Dallas hamburger joint Maple and Motor, touts the smoked fowl, considering the possibility that customers do not live by beef and pork alone. The sausage comes in "Old Style," peppery and coarse, and a softer, almost buttery "Smoked Cilantro." The sides include the standard slaw, beans, and potato salad, but you might be open-minded and opt for the Brussels sprouts, cauliflower au gratin, or sweet-potato casserole.

For extra-juicy brisket, the carver holds up


THE BEEF RIB HAS A CULT FOLLOWING, AND OFTEN SELLS OUT WITHIN 45 MINUTES OF OPENING.





Meat Up

At left, the dining room at Pecan Lodge and the restaurant's "Hot Mess" stuffed sweet potato. Above, brisket at Lockhart Smokehouse; below, multiple meats at Pecan Lodge.



WEB EXTRA
Find recipes for Pecan Lodge's collard greens, Lockhart Smokehouse's deviled eggs, Slow Bone's horseradish cream potato salad, and Ten 50's jalapeño torpedoes at www.texashighways.com/eat.





Slow and Low

Above and top right, Jeffery Hobbs, owner Jack Perkins, and Scott Austin serve up moist brisket at The Slow Bone. Below, Manager Shane Morgan works the pit at Ten 50; bottom right, the Ten 50 dining room.





the uncut slab to let the juice drip onto a piece of foil. Fashioning what looks like a pastry bag with the foil, he dribbles the liquid back into the brisket before slicing. Perkins emphasizes age with his brisket, something high-end steak houses advertise, but not a common theme in barbecue. Seeking the oldest briskets available from his supplier, he believes the meat's enzymes break down during storage, making the brisket more tender and flavorful.

TEN 50 BBQ

Larry Lavine is in a comfort zone, sitting among diners and greeting customers at his latest brainchild, Ten 50 BBQ, which opened in 2014. He brags on his wife's banana pudding, although he concedes it resulted from broken crust of a banana pie. The founder of Chili's, Lavine possesses three behemoth smokers and a core belief in Texans' food habits.

"Barbecue is white-hot right now across the country," he observes, "but it will cool down." Not so in Texas. "Texans have been eating barbecue for 100 years, and they will be eating it for the next 100 years."

An attraction at Ten 50 is the pork ribs, which are smoked with hickory, instead of the oak used for brisket. The restaurant also serves smoked turkey and chicken, as well as two sausage options—a special blend from Meyer's Elgin Sausage and a smoother grind with cheese and jalapeño produced by Tyler's Country Meat Market. Even so, Lavine believes success or failure in Texas depends on the quality of the brisket, and his carvers offer top-shelf lean, medium, and fatty cuts. Ten 50 provides sauce because some customers demand it, but given the meat's exquisite rendering, it's extraneous.

Lavine credits Cooper's Old Time Pit BBQ in Llano as the "grand-daddy" of Texas barbecue ambiance. Similar to Cooper's, Ten 50 queues customers near the outdoor pits and delivers meats to the carving station in full view. It's easy to believe the slogan on the employees' T-shirts: "We Live to Smoke."

Take nothing away from the longstanding Lockhart-Luling-Llano axis or the wunderkind Franklin Barbecue in Austin. Central Texas' status in Texas barbecue is secure. As Perkins at The Slow Bone puts it, "I wanted barbecue I liked. This is not Central Texas, so it's not Central Texas barbecue. It's not East Texas. Why can't we have North Texas barbecue?"

All the more reason to put a lasso around Dallas if you want to broaden your Texas barbecue experience. ★

Dallas-based journalist and barbecue fan John Lumpkin adheres to the taste test articulated by Larry Lewis, who makes wood-burning barbecue pits with Dallas-based A.N. Bewley Fabricators: "If you want to know how good it is, put a cash register at the end of the line." TH Photographer Will van Overbeek enjoys the Dallas restaurants' "21st-Century take on Texas barbecue. It's great barbecue—and you can get craft beer."

BIG D BBQ

ESSENTIALS

For information on barbecue restaurants in Dallas and beyond, check out the website of the Texas Barbecue Posse, a group of aficionados including *Dallas Morning News* staffers, www.texasbbqposse.com. Information on sites mentioned in the story follows:

Pecan Lodge is at 2702 Main St. in Dallas. Opens 11-3 Tuesday-Thursday; 11-10 Friday-Saturday; 11-3 Sunday. Call 214/748-8900; www.pecanlodg.com.

Lockhart Smokehouse is at 400 W. Davis St. in Dallas and 1026 E. 15th St. in Plano. Call 214/944-5521 for Dallas and 972/516-8900 for Plano; www.lockhartsmokehouse.com. Opens daily for lunch at 11 a.m. (until sold out) and for dinner at 5:30 p.m. (until sold out).


The Slow Bone is at 2234 Irving Blvd. in Dallas. Opens daily 11-3. Call 214/377-7727; www.slowbone.com.

Ten 50 BBQ is at 1050 N. Central Expressway in Richardson. Opens daily 10:50-2:30 for lunch and 5-8 for dinner. Call 972/234-1050; www.ten50bbq.com.

THE LURE OF THE LLANO

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHS BY E. DAN KLEPPER

75 I Love Thee



1. I love thee, I love thee, I love thee, my Lord;
2. I'm hap - py, I'm hap - py, oh, won - drous ac - count!
3. O Je - sus, my Sav - ior, with thee I am blest,
4. Oh, who's like my Sav - ior? he's *Sa - lem's bright King;



My joys are im - mor - t
My life and sal - va - ti
He smiles and he loves r

mount:
rest:
sing:



**HISTORIC CHARM AND MODERN OFFERINGS
FLOW NATURALLY ALONG THE LAZY LLANO RIVER**



S

shades of an urban beat have finally arrived in Llano, a Hill Country community along the Llano River and the default capital of the Llano Uplift, the ancient dome of characteristic pink granite poking out of the Edwards Plateau. Big-city commodities like grilled salmon, fresh-baked breakfast goods, and even a certified sommelier have found their way to Llano, a 19th-Century ranching community that once promised to become the “Pittsburgh of the West” courtesy of iron ore deposits nearby. Today, Llano blends the iconography of a typical Texas travel destination—BBQ, rodeos, antiques, bed-and-breakfast lodging—with a rising tide of global fare.

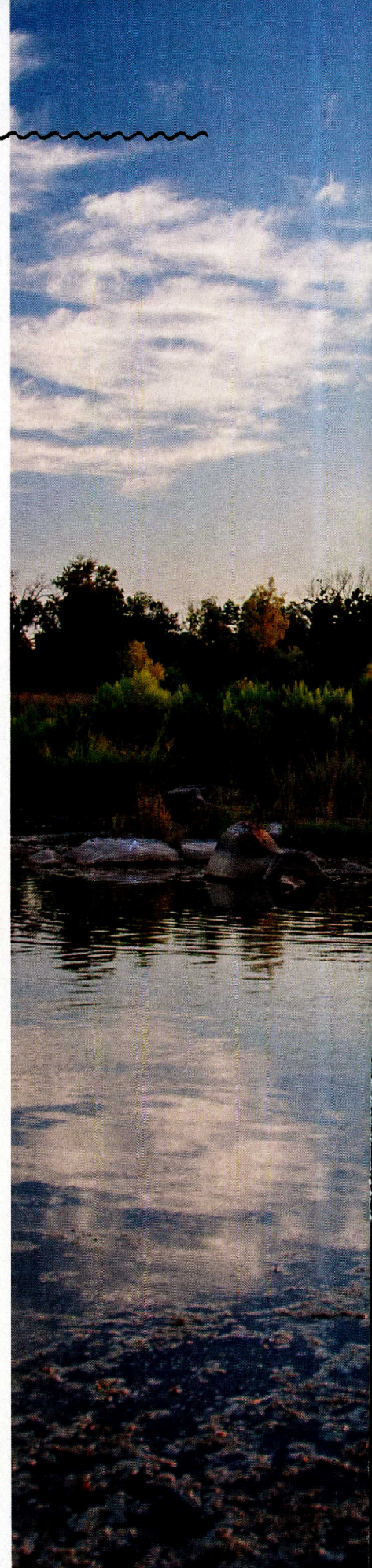
The vantage point midway along the Llano River Bridge will give you an idea of the mash-up. Hovering above one river bank you’ll see the clock tower of a Texas classic—the 19th-Century, Romanesque Revival county courthouse, completed in 1893; on the opposite bank, the hand-forged oven for Tommy’s Mesquite-Flamed Pizza, an open-air cabana that serves thin-crust pies covered in mozzarella, locally made sausage, and fresh basil plucked from gardens planted among the restaurant’s tiki torches. In between, the Llano River’s glassy surface, stowed up against a low flood-control dam, tempts you to bring a kayak and straddle the two worlds while paddling up an appetite.

It’s a curious compilation, you might think, just before you hear the test blast of Llano’s storm siren running through its paces. As if on cue, the mega-decibel horn heralds this new age, announcing the world awash at Llano’s doorstep. However you wish to regard the arrival, either as an endowment or incursion, you can blame it all on the river.

Fusion comes naturally to the Llano River, a spring-fed waterway that originates from two distinct branches. The North Llano appears in Sutton County before joining

WONDERFUL WATER

South Llano River State Park offers easy access to the Llano River for swimming, kayaking, or maneuvering a “toob” through gentle swells. In Castell, some 17 miles southwest of Llano, the river takes a lazy turn.



**FUSION COMES
NATURALLY TO
THE LLANO RIVER,
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**TODAY, LLANO
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DESTINATION—
BBQ, RODEOS,
ANTIQUES,
B&B'S—WITH A
RISING TIDE OF
GLOBAL FARE.**

RELAXED PACE

The Llano Piano awaits you at the Dabbs Hotel in Llano. Free-tailed bats exit the Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve. Farmstands offer eggs and produce during summer months. Tommy's Mesquite-Flamed Pizza has indoor and outdoor seating.

the southern tributary (arising in Edwards County) near the town of Junction. South Llano River State Park, just upriver from the confluence and featuring a stretch of water ideal for weekend retreats, occupies 2,600 acres of limestone- and oak-covered hills above dense, pecan-shaded bottomland. The abundant wild turkey habitat along the river here allows birders to witness flocks of hens and gobblers foraging in the thickets or crowding into tree-tops for a night's sleep. If you like to camp, pop a tent and grill some dinner or make a quick run into Junction, just seven miles away, to pick up some brisket from Lum's Bar-B-Que. For a light side dish, try Lum's Hungarian-style cucumber salad, which features sliced cucumbers and onions marinated in garlic, vinegar, and paprika.

The park's most appealing feature is its easy river access. Several put-ins and take-outs give you a chance to ride the currents and get wet without making it an all-day adventure ... unless you want one. In that case, you can launch a canoe or kayak and paddle the river all the way to Junction (arrange pick-up in advance). Or, keep it simple and rent a big yellow "toob" at park headquarters, and let the river show you just how lazy a day can get.

Once merged, the Llano River flows eastward out of Junction for approximately 100 miles, passing through Kimble, Mason, and Llano counties before joining the Colorado River near Marble Falls at Lake LBJ. Along the way, it picks up additional water from the James River, a 36-mile tributary that joins the Llano in south Mason County.

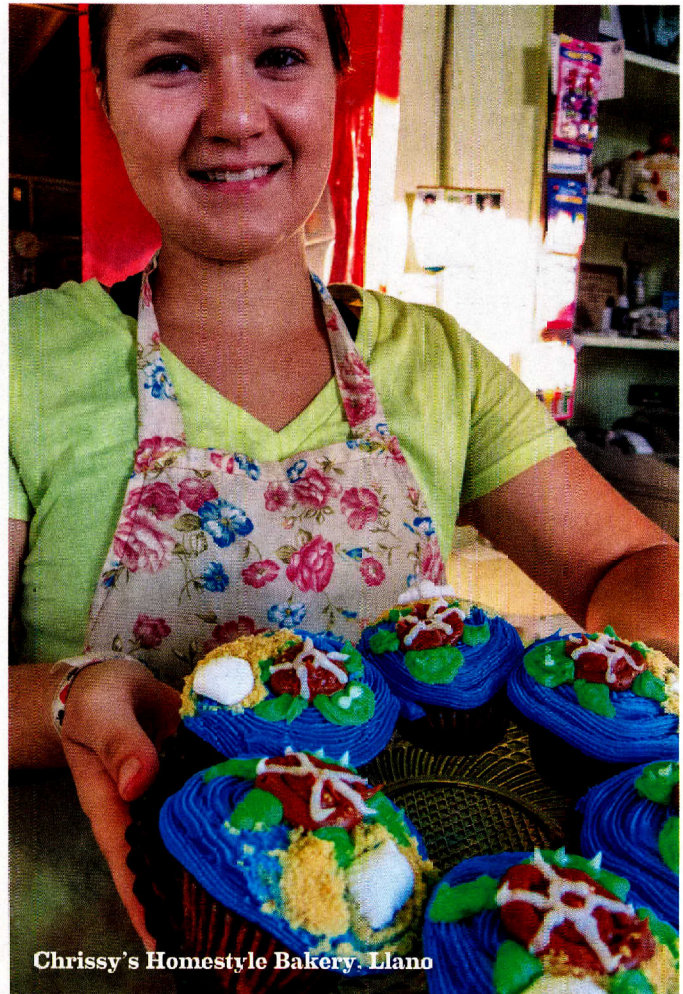
An overnight or two in the town of Mason, where guesthouses and B&Bs abound, will give you an opportunity to explore this very pretty countryside. If your visit falls between May and mid-October, reserve a spot on an interpretive tour of the Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve, where you can witness the nightly bat emergence from one of the largest bat nurseries in the country. The drive to the preserve, located approximately 17 miles south of Mason, can be as memorable as the bat flight. The route snakes through prime Hill Country scenery before crossing the James River along a natural limestone roadbed typically under at least a foot of water.

Any time of year, make a point to stop by Mason Country Collectibles, which lies just two blocks north of the courthouse square. Ask for a peek of the "Grand Azure," a record-holding 587-carat Texas topaz that resembles a flashy, faceted egg. Mason County, the topaz capital of Texas, hosts an unknown quantity of the state's official gemstone within its streambeds, ravines, and granite outcrops. The collectibles shop, a two-story accumulation of goods ranging from books to glassware, sells a selection of topaz-studded jewelry should you wish to own a little piece of Mason County bling. Or hunt for your own raw topaz on one of three Mason County ranches that offer organized access (learn details at the shop or at the Mason Chamber of Commerce).

After your topaz purchase, you'll need a place to sparkle, so head over to the Wine Bar at Sandstone Cellars Winery, one of several downtown Mason enterprises. Sample the goods from Sandstone's collection of award-winning wines, all produced at the winery from Mason County grapes. In a nod to the state's roots, Sandstone partners Manny Silerio and Scott Hauptert also opened Santos Taqueria



Texas Topaz



Chrissy's Homestyle Bakery, Llano



Sandstone Cellars Winery



Kayak rentals
at the Castell
General Store

in one of Mason's vintage buildings next door. Head chef Santos Silerio prepares authentic Tex-Mex cuisine like gorditas, taquitos, and a selection of flavorful salsas, including a green chile version that will light a fire in all the right places.

Once the Llano River arrives in Llano, it covers a wide swath between tree-lined banks courtesy of the Llano River Dam. The flood-control modification created Lake Llano, a swimming, fishing, and paddling destination for outdoors enthusiasts. (It's currently dredged for cleaning and expected to re-open in June.) Its north bank hosts Badu City Park, where jogging and cycling trails are available along with a canoe/kayak ramp. The park's scenic view—an expanse of river, dam, bridge, and sky that gains in beauty as dusk lights reflect off the water's surface—adds a surprising dazzle to Llano's small-town geniality.

The Llano community may be where the river makes its brassy splash, highlighting the confluence of the urban future and a rural, wilder past, but just before arriving in town, 20 minutes or so

**AFTER YOUR TOPAZ
PURCHASE, YOU'LL
NEED A PLACE TO
SPARKLE, SO HEAD
OVER TO THE WINE
BAR AT SANDSTONE
CELLARS WINERY,
ONE OF SEVERAL
DOWNTOWN MASON
ENTERPRISES.**

upriver along RR 152, the Llano takes a lazier turn. Its spring-fed shallows and trout-stocked pools coil around boulders and limestone flats before floating past the historic community of Castell, population 23.

Established by a congregation of German immigrants during the first half of the 19th Century, Castell is the oldest settlement in Llano County. The road dips just past the Castell General Store (great for burgers, BBQ, and live music on Saturday nights, and rib-eyes on Sundays) then traverses the Llano along a cement crossing above the water line (unless the river's on the rise). Bring a fly rod, binoculars, or your wading shoes to explore the environs, or rent a kayak from proprietor Randy Leifeste, a Castell native. Or pull out a camp chair and relax. At sundown, the current eases as dragonflies alight and rainbow trout rise in the shallows. Settle in and watch a river angler silhouetted against the oxide dusk, back-casting to-and-fro like a drowsy metronome, before delivering a fly as far as it will go into the lazy river night. ★

"Go for the river, stay for the wine, salsa, and pizza." E. Dan Klepper says of Llano River country.



ALONG THE LLANO

For details about **Llano**, contact the **Llano Chamber of Commerce**, 325/247-5354; www.llanochamber.org.

Tommy's Mesquite-Flamed Pizza is at 312 Bessemer Ave. Open Tue-Sat 11-7. Call 325/247-0388.

The Dabbs Hotel is at 112 E. Burnet St. Call 325/247-2200; www.thedabbs.com.

The Badu House is at 601 Bessemer Ave. Call 325/247-2238; www.thebaduhouse.com.

Chrissy's Homestyle Bakery is at 501 Bessemer Ave. Call 325/247-4564.

For details about **Junction**, contact the **Junction Chamber of Commerce**, 325/446-3190; www.junctiontexas.net.

Lum's Bar-B-Que is at 2031 Main St. Open daily. Call 325/446-3541; www.lumsbbq.com.

South Llano River State Park is at 1927 Park Rd. 73, just south of Junction. Call 325/446-3994; www.tpwd.texas.gov.

For details about **Mason**, contact the **Mason Chamber of Commerce**, 325/347-5758; www.masontxcoc.com.

Eckert James River Bat Cave Preserve requires advance reservations to witness the May-October bat emergencies. Call 325/347-5970.

Casa Guadalupe Guest House is at 117 Spruce St. Call 325/347-7829; www.stayinmasontx.com.

Mason Country Collectibles is at 424 Fort McKavitt St. Open daily. Call 325/347-5249; www.masoncountrycollectibles.com.

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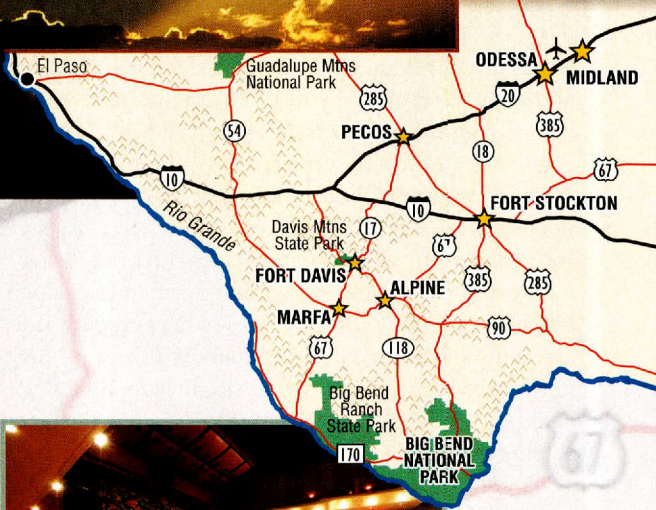
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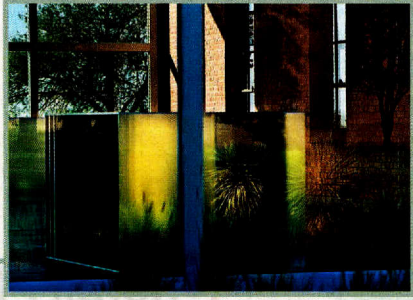
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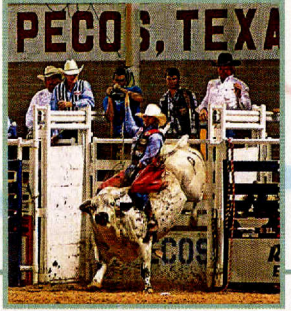
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- Apr 1-30** - Sam Falls at Ballroom Marfa - **Marfa**
- Apr 11** - 28th Annual Reeves County Health Fair - **Pecos**
- Apr 12** - MAMMA MIA! at Wagner Noël Performing Arts Center - **Odessa**
- Apr 16** - Student Art Festival - **Pecos**
- Apr 17-18** - Trappings of Texas Western Art & Gear Show/Sale - **Alpine**
- Apr 17-19** - Big Bend Gem & Mineral Show - **Alpine**
- Apr 17-25** - West Side Story at Historic Yucca Theatre - **Midland**

- Apr 19** - Chinati Foundation Community Day - **Marfa**
- Apr 22-25** - Big Bend Open Road Race - **Fort Stockton**
- Apr 25** - 1st Annual Mile High Chili Cook-off - **Fort Davis**
- Apr 25** - George Lopez at Wagner Noël Performing Arts Center - **Midland**
- May 1-3** - Fiesta West Texas at Ector County Coliseum - **Odessa**
- May 2** - Cinco de Mayo Boxing Tournament - **Fort Davis**
- Jun** - Summer off the Patio/Blue Moon Park Concerts - **Fort Stockton**

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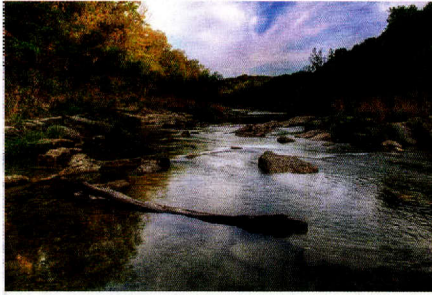
Out of This World!

SPACE CENTER HOUSTON'S
LEVEL 9 TOUR

Text by DAN OKO



SPLASHDOWN!
NASA contractors
train in the Johnson
Space Center's
Neutral Buoyancy
Laboratory, a 6.2-
million gallon pool.



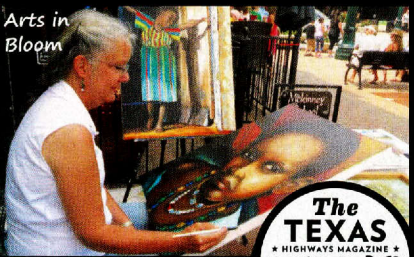
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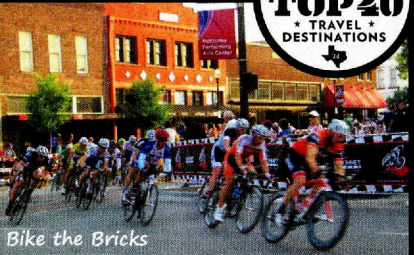
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accidentally launch any-
thing, so don't touch any
buttons,” says David Cis-
co, a former spacecraft
technician who worked
on Project Apollo in the
1960s, as we stand before

an array of control panels in NASA's historic Mission Control. The fact that Cisco is joking—the dials and monitors no longer function—doesn't diminish the awe that seizes my tour group as we study the rows of beige desks and banks of old-fashioned computer screens. This was the nerve center for NASA moon landings in the 1960s and early '70s, which made household names of astronauts like Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin.

Cisco, a docent at Space Center Houston—the nonprofit visitor center of NASA's Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center—has dropped in on our “behind the scenes” Level 9 Tour. Our guide, Gabe Rangel, is happy to share the spotlight with Cisco. “You don't have to be the quarterback to be on the team,” says Cisco, recounting his memories of NASA's early days and the immense group effort that fueled Project Apollo in the heady days of the Space Race.

The tour includes sites not normally open to tourists and offers a perspective of the space program several degrees more detailed than the Space Center's tram ride.



For the general public, the Level 9 Tour is the only way to get such an intimate view of the space program and its development from the first moonshot through today. Limited to 12 participants per group, the four- to five-hour tour travels by van and makes about eight stops across the 1,600-acre campus. The tour includes sites not normally open to tourists and offers a perspective of the space program several degrees more detailed than the Space Center's tram ride. As our tour visited Rocket Park, training facilities, and even the NASA café for lunch, the knowledgeable guides provided thorough lectures on past, present, and future missions. We saw posters showing space mission timelines, examples of the suits worn by astronauts across the last half-century, and all manner of patches and paraphernalia from moonstones to newspaper clippings revisiting

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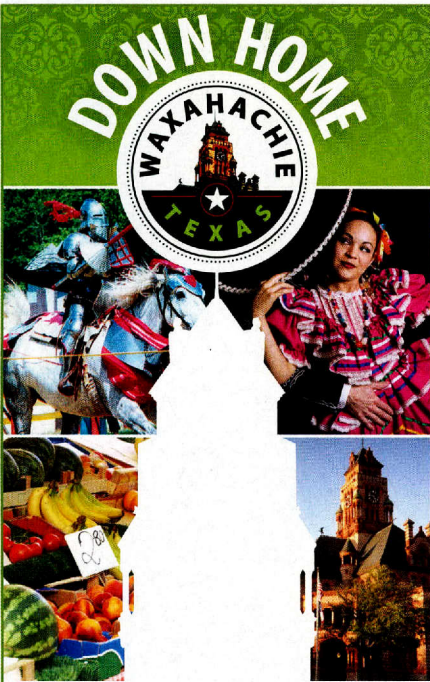
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many of NASA's proudest achievements. It was as in-depth a trip as any earthbound space cadet could imagine.

In the Building 9 Space Vehicle Mockup Facility, our group wandered among extraordinary models of the International Space Station, a real Russian Soyuz capsule, Mars Rovers, and spacecraft designed by the private company Space X, which last year began construction on a new rocket launch site in South Texas. Level 9 tourists are allowed onto the floor of the enormous garage, which is about the size of a city block. We inspected a partial gravity simulator, tough-looking rovers, and the Dragon 2, a propulsive cone that resembled a vintage vessel from *Flash Gordon*.

"We're moving forward on space exploration," says Rangel, alluding to questions over recent NASA downsizing and the termination of the Space Shuttle program. "But every time we do a tour, we have one or two who raise their hands who think NASA is shutting down."

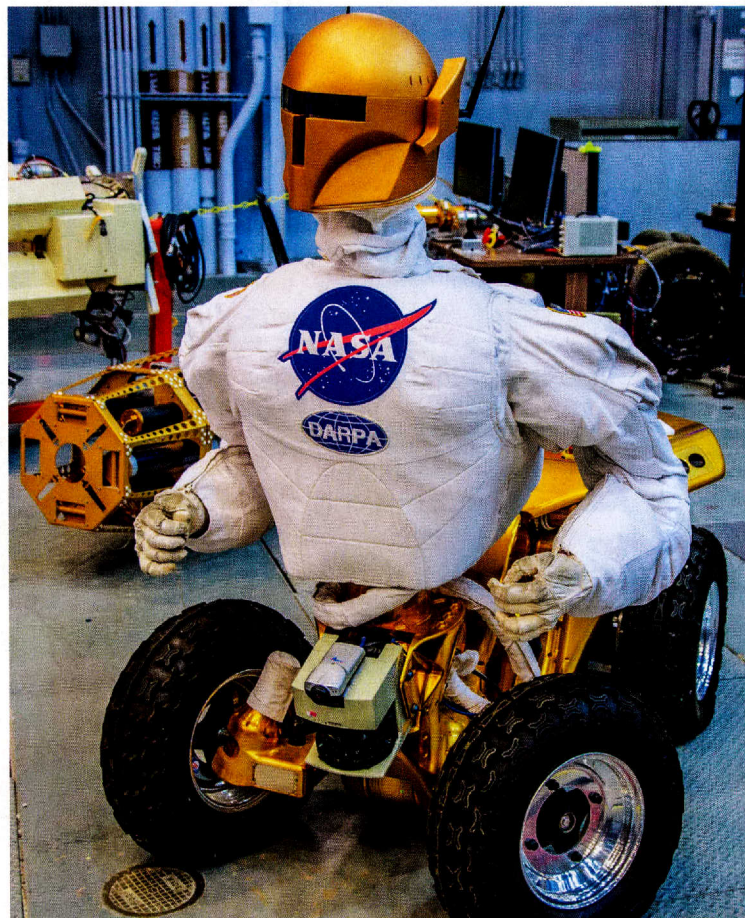
Judging from the activity and energy

I witnessed on my tour last fall, nothing could be further from the truth. The White House recently announced its intention to send people to Mars within 20 years, and the surrounding research and test flights to determine mission feasibility make it a busy time at Johnson Space Center.

At the active Mission Control, included as a stop on the Level 9 tour, technicians coordinate and oversee the goings-on for the crew aboard the International Space Station. In a room with abundant computers and 40-foot, flat-screen display monitors, a skeleton crew kept an eye on the orbiting ISS. When compared to the historic Mission Control we also visited, there's no doubt that audiovisual communication has come a long way since those old Apollo missions.

As the tour continued, we learned about Johnson Space Center's role in Commander Scott Kelly's mission on the International Space Station. As of press time, Kelly and Russian cosmonaut

ROBONAUT
Level 9 Tour participants get an up-close look at the Robonaut, a dexterous humanoid robot designed to perform dangerous tasks in space.

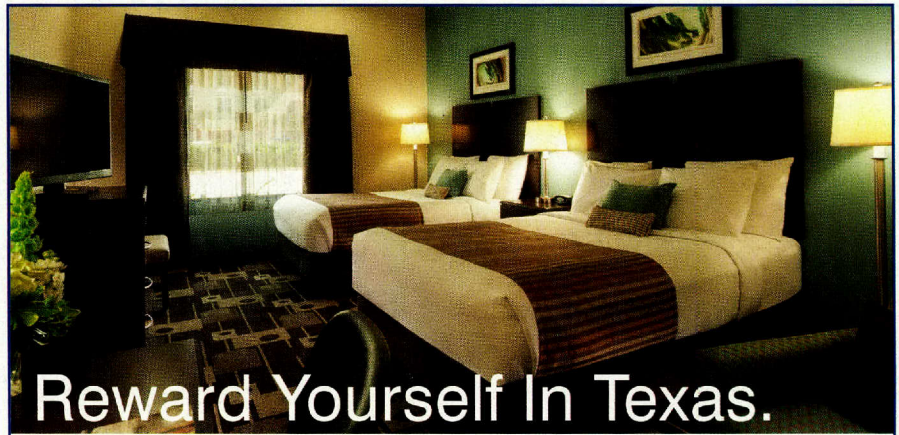


Mikhail Kornienko were scheduled to travel to the station in spring for an unprecedented 12-month stay. Most space station missions last six months, but Kelly is part of an experiment to judge the possible impacts of a longer duration of space travel—bone loss and muscular atrophy, for example—as NASA prepares for possible manned voyages to Mars (a journey expected to last 30 months). Meanwhile, Scott's identical twin brother, astronaut Mark Kelly, will act as the experiment's earthbound control subject. (Mark Kelly is perhaps most famous for his marriage to former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, who was the victim of a 2011 assassination attempt.) Both the Kellys have been preparing for the mission at space center facilities, including at four stops like the Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory.

Johnson Space Center is also administering NASA's Orion Spacecraft program, sometimes called "the new era of American space exploration." The program made national headlines in late 2014 when the Delta IV Heavy rocket carried an unmanned Orion Spacecraft into orbit. In just a few years, the Orion capsule, which was designed to ultimately make the trip to Mars with four crewmembers, will see its first manned mission.

For Texans, the activity at Johnson Space Center is no big surprise. Since the inception of NASA's Manned Aircraft Center in 1961, no American city has been more closely associated with the U.S. space program than Houston. From the Apollo moonshots described by David Cisco to the recently retired Space Shuttle program, the center—named after Lyndon B. Johnson for his efforts as a senator to headquarter the space program in Houston—has remained crucial to the broad goals of space flight.

During our stop at the Sonny Carter Training Facility, home of the Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory, we watched astronauts in training. The lab is known as the world's largest indoor pool, measuring 202 feet long. [continued on page 91]



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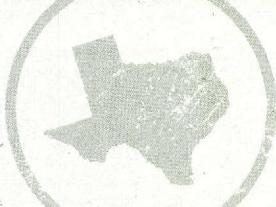
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THE VILLAGE OF SALADO



« continued from page 89 | 100 feet wide, 40 feet deep, and holding 6.2 million gallons of water. Next to a submerged life-size mockup of the International Space Station—which is the reason the pool has to be so big—veteran NASA astronaut Stan Love and astronaut candidate Tyler Hague practice moves they hope to use someday in a micro-gravity environment. As Love and Hague work underwater, wearing pressurized suits weighing nearly 300 pounds (and costing \$18 million), a team of offshore rig workers practices emergency procedures at the other end of the pool.

In 2008, Love participated in two spacewalks totaling 15 hours to help install a European science lab at the ISS; in 2013, newcomer Hague was selected as part of the 21st NASA astronaut class. “Once you are assigned to a mission, you practice very specific activities,” Rangel explains as we observe the training. “Every move in the suit is an exercise to itself.”

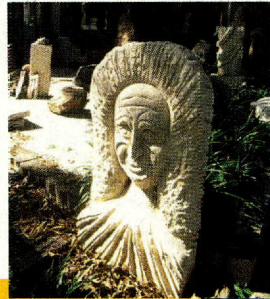
As the Level 9 Tour wraps, I leave the Johnson Space Center with a much better understanding of what it takes to pull off a successful space mission—be it a pioneering trip to a meteor or changing the gaskets on a toilet aboard the International Space Station. Contemplating the night sky, my heart beats a little faster. It’s true, I will never be an astronaut, but as someone who regularly abides the call of the open road, I feel simpatico with those brave men and women who have made it possible for humankind to reach the stars. ★

SPACE CENTER HOUSTON

is at 1601 NASA Pkwy. Level 9 Tours take place weekdays at 11:45 a.m. with additional tours offered at 10:45 a.m. on Mondays and Fridays. Tickets cost \$89.95 and include general entry into Space Center Houston exhibits. Participants must be at least 14 years old; advance reservations recommended.

Call 281/283-4755; www.spacecenter.org/attractions/level-9-tour.

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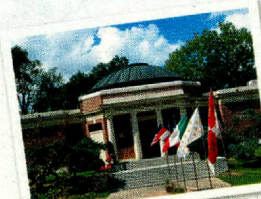


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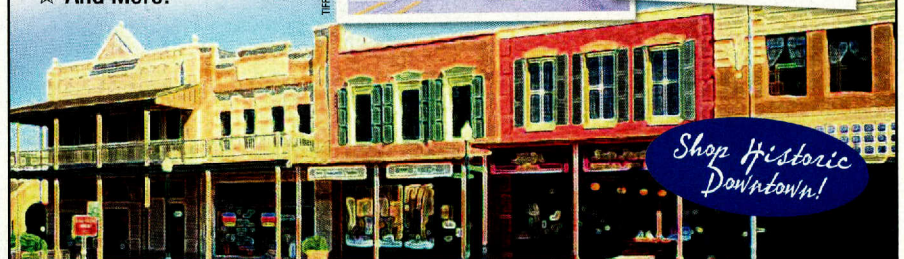
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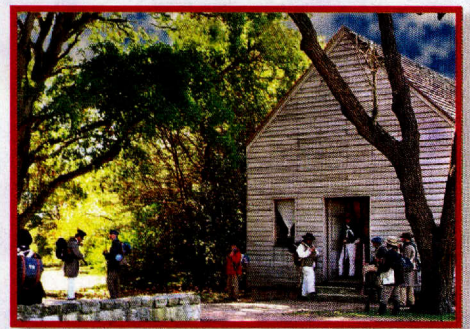
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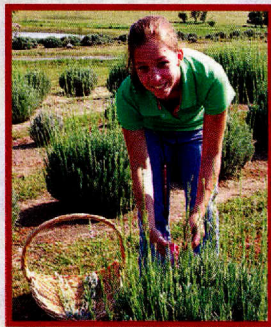
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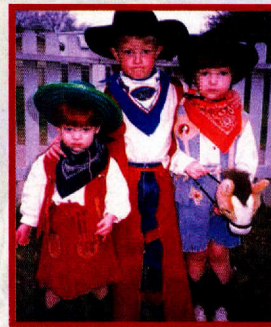
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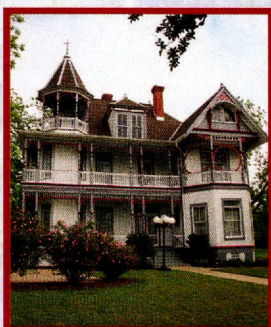
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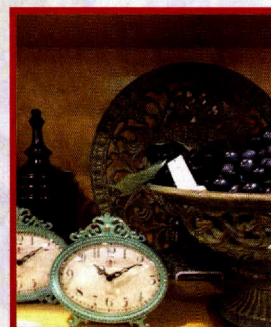
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E V E N T S

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April's travel spotlights:



GULF COAST > *Corpus Christi* **Como la Flor**

Luminaries of Latin and Tejano music will take the stage April 17-18 in Corpus Christi for Fiesta de la Flor, a tribute to the late hometown star Selena Quintanilla Perez. Twenty years after Selena died tragically in the prime of her career, the festival will celebrate the life and legacy of the "Queen of Tejano" at North Bayfront Park. The lineup of about 12 bands includes A.B. Quintanilla y Los Kumbia King All Starz, Los Lobos, Clarissa Serna, and Little Joe y La Familia. The event will also feature a screening of the biopic *Selena*, food trucks, children's activities, and a fireworks finale. Tickets cost \$5. www.fiestadelaflor.com.

PRAIRIES AND LAKES > *Eagle Lake*

Prairie Chickens

The Booming N Blooming Festival at the Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge in Eagle Lake offers the chance to observe the unusual courtship ritual of Attwater's prairie chickens in their native coastal prairie habitat. Held April 11-12, the event includes viewing tours to see the endangered ground-dwelling birds on their "booming grounds," where the males inflate their bright yellow air sacs, hold their tails erect, stomp their feet, and charge at competitors. Birding tours, native plant tours, biologist presentations, and a children's art contest round out the weekend. www.fws.gov/refuge/Attwater_Prairie_Chicken.



PANHANDLE PLAINS > *Amarillo*

Horse Sense

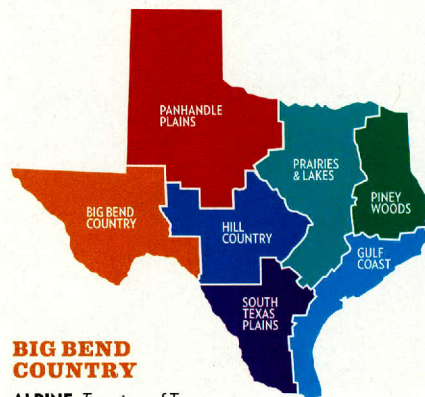
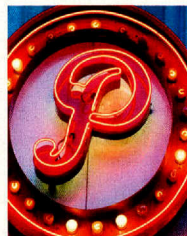
The American Quarter Horse is prized for its versatility, from ranch work to its speed on the quarter-mile track—the inspiration for its name. And for 75 years, breeders of the popular horse have registered their foals with the Amarillo-based American Quarter Horse Association. To celebrate the association's diamond anniversary, the American Quarter Horse Hall of Fame & Museum is honoring the 16 ranches and individuals—10 from Texas—who have registered an American Quarter Horse every year since 1940. See historic photos, biographies, saddles, awards, and equipment from the breeders' private collections. Through July 25. www.aqha.com/Museum.



HILL COUNTRY > *Austin*

Paramount Centennial

In its 100 years, Austin's Paramount Theatre has hosted everyone from Harry Houdini in 1916, to the world premiere of *Batman* in 1966, to President Barack Obama in 2014. The Paramount is celebrating its centennial throughout 2015, including a free April 1 screening of the Marx Brothers' *A Night at the Opera*, the Moontower Comedy & Oddity Festival April 22-25, a Centennial Gala featuring Lyle Lovett and Patty Griffin on May 9, and in October, the installation of a 47-foot-tall electric sign to replace the long-gone original. www.austintheatre.org/100.



BIG BEND COUNTRY

ALPINE: *Trappings of Texas* April 17-18. Museum of the Big Bend. www.sulross.edu/museum/events.html 432/837-8143

FORT STOCKTON/SANDERSON: Big Bend Open Road Race April 22-25. www.bborr.com

ODESSA: *Art & Fashion of the 1920s* March 1-May 31. Ellen Noel Art Museum. www.noelartmuseum.org

SANDERSON: Terrell County Sheriff Department's Annual Easter Egg Hunt April 4. Terrell County Courthouse. www.sandersonchamberofcommerce.info

VAN HORN: Building Bridges Art Show April 15-17. Van Horn Convention Center. 432/283-2682

GULF COAST

BEAUMONT: *Caprice Pierucci: Dream State* January 17-April 12. Art Museum of Southeast Texas. www.amset.org 409/832-3432

BEAUMONT: *Harvey Johnson: A Triple Middle Passage* January 17-April 12. Art Museum of Southeast Texas. www.amset.org 409/832-3432

BEAUMONT: South Texas State Fair March 26-April 5. Ford Park. www.ymlb.org

BEAUMONT: *Selections from the Permanent Collection* April 25-August 30. Art Museum of Southeast Texas. www.amset.org 409/832-3432

BEAUMONT: *Will-Amelia Sterns Price: Mike's Road to*

Taos April 25-August 30. Art Museum of Southeast Texas. www.amset.org 409/832-3432

BRAZORIA: Levi Jordan Plantation Site Tour April 4. www.visitlevijordanplantation.com 979/798-2202

BROWNSVILLE: Bunny Corral and Egg-cellent Easter Activities April 4-5. Gladys Porter Zoo. www.gpz.org 956/546-7187

BROWNSVILLE: Living History Program April 4. Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park. www.nps.gov/paal/index.htm 956/541-2785 ext. 324

CORPUS CHRISTI: *Bayou City Chic: Progressive Streams of Modern Art in Houston, 1950-1980* January 31-April 26. Art Museum of South Texas. www.artmuseumofsouthtexas.org 361/825-3500

CORPUS CHRISTI: Corpus Christi First Weekend April 3-5. Various locations. www.corpuschristi1st.com 800/766-2322

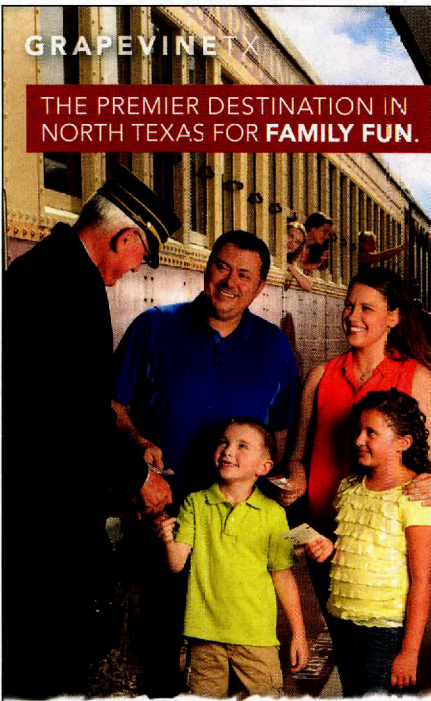
CORPUS CHRISTI: Big Bloom Plant Sale and Garden Festival April 4. www.stxbot.org 361/852-2100

CORPUS CHRISTI: Landscaping for Birds and Butterflies Short Course April 10-11. South Texas Botanical Gardens and Nature Center. www.stxbot.org 361/852-2100

CORPUS CHRISTI: Buc Days April 23-May 2. www.bucdays.com

GRAPEVINE TX

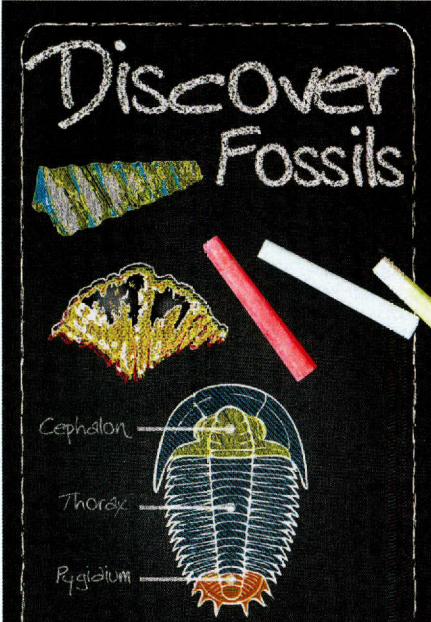
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CYPRESS: Fenske's Trade Days and Craft Market April 11-12, 25-26. www.fenskescountrystore.com 713/870-3806

FREEPORT: Schuster Home Museum Tour April 25. 979/297-0868

GALVESTON: Galveston FeatherFest Birding and Nature Photography Festival April 9-12. www.GalvestonFeatherFest.com 832/459-5533

GALVESTON: The Grand Kids Festival 20th Anniversary Celebration April 11. The Grand 1894 Opera House. www.GrandKidsFestival.com 800/821-1894

HOUSTON: *Pauline Jakobsberg: Birthrights Left Behind* October 31-June 14. Holocaust Museum Houston. www.hmh.org 713/527-1640

HOUSTON: *Mel Chin: Rematch* January 17-April 19. Asia Society Texas Center. www.asiasociety.org/texas 713/496-9901

HOUSTON: *For a New World to Come: Experiments in Japanese Art and Photography, 1968-1979* February 1-April 26. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. www.mfah.org

HOUSTON: *Dining and Discourse: A Discussion in Three Courses* February 6-May 10. Houston Center for Contemporary Craft. www.crafthouston.org

HOUSTON: *one day, late in the afternoon...* February 6-May 10. Houston Center for Contemporary Craft. www.crafthouston.org

HOUSTON: *Spectacular Rubens* February 15-May 10. Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. www.mfah.org

HOUSTON: *The Other Side: Chinese and Mexican Immigration to America* March 28-July 19. Asia Society Texas Center. www.asiasociety.org/texas 713/496-9901

HOUSTON: First Saturday Arts Market April 4. Next to Gen's Antiques. www.firstsaturdayartsmarket.com 713/802-1213

HOUSTON: Heights Spring Home and Garden Tour April 10. Silver Street Studios. www.visithouston.texas.com 713/861-4002

HOUSTON: Houston Early Music Presents Quicksilver in Concert April 10. Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church. www.HoustonEarlyMusic.org

HOUSTON: 2015 Monster Energy AMA Supercross April 11. NRG Park. www.visithouston.texas.com

HOUSTON: MS 150 Bike Ride April 18-19. Various locations. www.nationalmsociety.org 800/323-4873

HOUSTON: *Tonal Impact* April 24-25. Zilkha Hall at Hobby Center for the Performing Arts. www.musiqahouston.org 713/524-5678

LA PORTE: San Jacinto Day Festival and Battle Re-enactment April 18. San Jacinto Battleground State Historic Site. www.sanjacintomuseum.org 281/479-2421

LA PORTE: Sylvan Beach Festival April 24-25. www.laportechamber.org 281/471-1123

LAKE JACKSON: Taste of the Town April 26. Brazos Mall. www.brazosport.org 979/285-2501

PORT ARANSAS: Texas SandFest April 24-26. Mustang Island Beach. www.texasandfest.com 361/758-9800

PORT ARTHUR: Carnival des Cajuns April 11-12. Port Arthur Pavilion. 409/835-0885

PORT NECHES: Port Neches Riverfest April 29-May 3. Port Neches Park. www.pnriverfest.com 409/722-9155

PORTLAND: Windfest April 17-19. Portland Community Center. www.portlandtx.org 361/643-2475

RICHMOND: An Old-Fashioned Easter April 4. George Ranch Historical Park. www.georgeranch.org

RICHMOND: Runaway Scrape April 11. George Ranch Historical Park. www.georgeranch.org

RICHMOND: Lone Star Stomp April 18. Fort Bend County Museum. www.fortbendmuseum.org

ROCKPORT: Tour of Homes/Boats April 11-12. Various locations. 361/729-5519

ROSENBERG: Bird Hikes at Seabourne Creek Nature Park April 1. 281/633-7033

ROSENBERG: RailFest April 11. Rosenberg Railroad Museum. www.rosenbergrrmuseum.org 281/633-2846

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND: Beach 'n' Biker Fest April 11-13. SPI Convention Centre. www.sopadre.com 956/761-8110

SPRING: Texas Crawfish Festival April 24-26 and May 1-3. Old Town Spring. www.texas-crawfish-festival.com 281/353-9310

SUGAR LAND: *Crystals of India* December 12-May 5. Houston Museum of Natural Science at Sugar Land. www.hmns.org/sugarland

SUGAR LAND: Sugar Land Wine and Food Affair April 8-12. Various locations. www.sugarlandwineandfoodaffair.com 832/831-3167

VICTORIA: Historic Homes Tour April 11-12. Various locations. www.vpvtx.org 361/573-1878

VICTORIA: Scott Taylor Band Crawfish Festival April 11. Victoria Community Center. www.thescotttaylorband.com

VICTORIA: Art Car Victoria April 18. Downtown. www.navemuseum.com 361/575-8227

VICTORIA: Devereux Spring Fling April 18-19. www.devereuxgardens.com 361/574-7245

VICTORIA: JAM Fest April 18. Downtown. www.visitvictoriatexas.com

HILL COUNTRY

AUSTIN: *La Belle: The Ship That Changed History* Through May 17. Bullock Texas State History Museum. www.TheStoryofTexas.com 512/936-8746

AUSTIN: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* February 10-July 6. Harry Ransom Center. www.hrc.utexas.edu

AUSTIN: *Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties* February 15-May 10. Blanton Museum of Art. www.blantonmuseum.org 512/471-7324

AUSTIN: *Wildly Strange: The Photographs of Ralph Eugene Meatyard* March 7-June 21. The Blanton Museum of Art. www.blantonmuseum.org 512/471-7324

AUSTIN: Austin International Poetry Festival April 9-12. Various venues. www.aipf.org 512/203-0555

AUSTIN: Texas Burlesque Festival April 9-11. Marchesa Hall and Theatre. www.texasburlesquefestival.com

AUSTIN: Austin Fashion Week April 10-18. Various locations. www.afw.fashionx.austin.com

AUSTIN: Euphoria Music and Camping Festival April 10-12. Carson Creek Ranch. www.euphoriafest.com

AUSTIN: MotoGP Grand Prix of the Americas April 10-12. Circuit of the Americas. www.circuitoftheamericas.com

AUSTIN: Spring Plant Sale and Gardening Festival April 11-12. Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. www.wildflower.org

AUSTIN: Austin Reggae Festival April 17-19. Auditorium Shores. www.austinreggaefest.com

AUSTIN: Lone Star Round Up April 17-18. Travis County Expo Center and along South Congress Avenue. www.lonestarroundup.com

AUSTIN: Moontower Comedy and Oddity Festival April 22-25. Various venues. www.moontowercomedyfestival.com

AUSTIN: Austin Food and Wine Festival April 24-26. Various locations. www.austinfoodandwinefestival.com

AUSTIN: Art City Austin April 25-26. Downtown. www.artallianceaustin.org

AUSTIN: Eeyore's Birthday Bash April 25. Pease Park. www.eeyores.org

AUSTIN: Louisiana Swamp Thing and Crawfish Festival April 25. Austin American Statesman Lot. www.roadwayevents.com 512/441-9015

BANDERA: Bandera Market Days April 4. Courthouse Lawn. www.banderatexasbusiness.com/market-days 830/796-4447

BANDERA: Cowboys on Main April 4, 18, 25. Downtown. 830/796-4447

BANDERA: Frontier Times Museum Cowboy Camp April 11. www.frontiertimesmuseum.org 830/796-3864

BANDERA: Mayhem on the Medina April 11-12. Bandera City Park. www.mayhemonthemedina.com 830/796-4447

BANDERA: Spring Benefit Trail Ride April 17-19. Hill Country State Natural Area. 830/796-3045

BANDERA: Fourth Friday Jam April 24. Silver Sage Community Center. www.silversagecorral.org 830/796-4969

BLANCO: Wild Woman Weekend April 10-12. Old Blanco County Courthouse. www.wildwomanweekend.org 512/750-6362

BOERNE: Parade of Artists April 10-12. Various locations. www.boerneprofessionalartists.com 830/249-7277

BOERNE: Boerne Market Days April 11-12. Main Plaza. www.boernemarketdays.com 830/249-7277

BOERNE: Second Saturday Art and Wine April 11. www.secondsaturdayartandwine.com 830/249-7277

BOERNE: Texas Corvette Association Open Car Show April 18. Main Plaza. 830/249-7277

BRADY: McCulloch County Early Days April 17-18. Richards Park. 325/456-4499

BUDA: Buda Wiener Dog Races April 25-26. Buda City Park. www.budalions.com

BUDA: Buda Fine Art Express April 18-19. Buda City Park Pavilion. www.chrysalisartfoundation.org 512/557-8880

BURNET: Bluebonnet Festival April 10-12. Downtown. www.bluebonnetfestival.org 512/756-4297

BURNET: Bluebonnet Air Show April 25. www.highlandlakessquadron.com 512/756-2226

CASTROVILLE: Tour de Castroville April 4. Castroville Regional Park. www.castrovilletx.gov/tourdecastroville 830/538-9838

DRIFTWOOD: Old Settler's Music Festival April 16-19. Salt Lick Pavilion and Camp Ben McCulloch. www.oldsettlersmusicfest.org

DRIPPING SPRINGS: Texas Hill Country Olive, Wine and Food Festival April 11. Texas Hill Country Olive Company. www.texasolivefest.com

DRIPPING SPRINGS: Tour the Talent Studio Tour April 11-12. Various locations. www.tourthetalent.com

DRIPPING SPRINGS: Founders Day Festival April 24-26. Downtown. www.foundersdayfestival.com

FREDERICKSBURG: First Friday Art Walk April 3. Various locations. www.ffawf.com 830/997-6523

FREDERICKSBURG: Wildflower Celebration at Wildseed Farms April 4-19. www.wildseedfarms.com 830/990-8080

FREDERICKSBURG: Wine and Wildflower Trail April 10-26. Texas Hill Country wineries. www.texaswinetrail.com 512/914-5561

FREDERICKSBURG: Bluebonnet Tractor Ride April 11. www.rustyiron.org 830/889-9348

FREDERICKSBURG: Historic Country Schools Open House Tour April 11. Various locations. www.historicschools.org 830/685-3321

FREDERICKSBURG: Pacific Combat Living History Program April 11-12. National Museum of the Pacific War Pacific Combat Zone. www.pacificwar.museum.org 830/997-8600 ext. 205

FREDERICKSBURG: Fredericksburg Trade Days April 17-19. Seven miles east of town off U.S. 290. www.fbgtradedays.com 210/846-4094

FREDERICKSBURG: Texas History Days at Fort Martin Scott April 24-26. www.ftmartinscott.org

FREDERICKSBURG: Wings Over the Hills Nature Festival April 24-26. Lady Bird Johnson Municipal Park. www.wingstx.org 830/990-9823

GRUENE: Old Gruene Market Days April 11-12. Gruene Historic District. www.gruenemarketdays.com 830/832-1721

JOHNSON CITY: Bunkhouse Gallery Fine Art and Jewelry Exhibition and Sale April 4-5. www.wenmohsranch.com 512/517-3453

JOHNSON CITY: Stone Valley Music Festival April 11. Stone Valley Music Park. www.stonevalleytexas.com 713/851-0163

JOHNSON CITY: Art, Wine and Live Music April 12. Taste Wine + Art. www.TASTEwineArt.com 830/868-9290

JOHNSON CITY: Art Walk in Johnson City April 25. Various locations on Main and Nugent streets. www.lbjcountry.com 830/868-7684

JOHNSON CITY: Market Days April 25-26. Memorial Park. www.johnsoncity-texas.com 830/868-7684

KERRVILLE: Dog Agility Show April 3-5. Kerr County Hill Country Youth Event Center. www.heartoftexas.dogsports.com 512/663-2055

KERRVILLE: Easter Hill Country Bike Tour April 3-5. Schreiner University. www.ehct.com

KERRVILLE: First Friday Wine Share April 3. 830/200-1483

KERRVILLE: Here's to the Heroes Easterfest and Cook-Off April 4. Flat Rock Lake Park. www.kerrvilleeasterfest.com 830/896-1155

KERRVILLE: Hill Country Swap Meet April 4. Kerr County Hill Country Youth Event Center.

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830/459-6198

KERRVILLE: Small Quilts
April 23-May 17. Kerr Arts
and Cultural Center.
www.kackkerrville.com
830/895-2911

KERRVILLE: Kerr County
Market Days April 25.
Kerr County Courthouse.
www.kermarketdays.org
830/895-7524

KERRVILLE: Spring Native
Plant Sale and Festival
April 25. Riverside Nature
Center. www.riversidenature
center.org 830/257-4837

KYLE: Kyle Market Days
April 11. City Square Park.
www.kylepard.com
512/262-3939

KYLE: Lake Kyle Jubilee
April 24. Lake Kyle Park.
www.cityofkyle.com
512/262-3939

LAMPASAS: Bloomin' Fest
April 4. Downtown on the
square. www.lampasas
chamber.org 512/556-5172

LAMPASAS: Lampasas
Hillacious Bike Tour
April 11. www.lampasas
hillaciousbiketour.com
512/556-6831

LAMPASAS: Citywide
Garage Sale April 25. Various
locations. 512/556-5434

LUCKENBACH: iRun
Texas Lone Star Half
Marathon and 5K April 11.
www.lone-star-half.com
830/997-3224

MARBLE FALLS: Citywide
Garage Sale April 4. Johnson
Park. www.marblefalls.org
830/693-2815

MARBLE FALLS: Paint
the Town April 9-11.
www.paintthetownmftx.org
830/693-2815

NEW BRAUNFELS:
Folkfest April 11-12.
Heritage Village.
www.nbheritagevillage.com
830/629-6504

NEW BRAUNFELS:
Train Show April 11-12.
New Braunfels Civic Center.
www.newbraunfelsrailroad
museum.org/trainshow.htm

OZONA: Levis and Lace
29th Annual Anniversary
Square Dance April 25.
Crockett County Civic and
Youth Center. 325/392-2238

ROUND ROCK: Texas
Rattlesnake Festival April 11-
12. Heritage Center at the
Dell Diamond. www.texas
rattlesnakefestival.com
919/413-6318

SAN MARCOS:
*Homegrown: Austin Music
Posters, 1967 to 1982*
January 12-July 3. The

Wittliff Collections, Alkek
Library. www.thewittliff
collections.txstate.edu
512/245-2313

SAN MARCOS: *The Face
of Texas* January 12-May 5.
The Wittliff Collections,
Alkek Library. www.the
wittliffcollections.txstate.edu
512/245-2313

SAN MARCOS: *Armadillo
Rising: Austin's Music Scene
in the 1970s* February 9-
July 3. The Wittliff
Collections, Alkek Library.
www.thewittliffcollections.
txstate.edu 512/245-2313

SAN MARCOS: Spring
Fest April 4. Rio Vista Park.
www.kayakinstruction.org
512/203-0093

SAN MARCOS: Wine and
Art Weekend April 10-12.
Downtown. www.smtx
winewalk.com 512/393-8430

SAN MARCOS: Texas Wild
Rice Festival April 11. Sewell
Park. www.texaswildrice
festival.org 512/393-5930

SAN MARCOS: Youthfest
April 11. San Marcos Plaza
Park. www.gsmc.org/
youthfest.html 512/754-0500

SAN MARCOS: Mutt Strutt
April 18. San Marcos Plaza
Park. www.muttstrutt.org
512/805-2650

SAN MARCOS: MR Fest
April 24-25. www.ktsw.
txstate.edu 512/245-3485

SAN MARCOS: Feria Del
Mariachi April 25. San
Marcos Conference Center
at Embassy Suites.
www.feriadelmariachi.com
512/245-2651

STONEWALL: Easter at
the Sauer-Beckmann Living
History Farm April 4.
Lyndon B. Johnson State
Park & Historic Site.
www.tpwd.state.tx.us
830/644-2252

STONEWALL: Reflections
of the Sixties April 11.
LBJ National Park. www.
johnsoncity-texas.com
830/868-7128 ext. 222

UVALDE: Four Square
Friday April 10. Downtown.
www.visituvalde.com
830/278-4115

WIMBERLEY: Market Days
April 4. Lions Field.
www.shopmarketdays.com
512/847-2201

WIMBERLEY: Second
Saturday Gallery Trail
April 11. Wimberley Square.
www.wimberleyarts.org
512/847-2201

WIMBERLEY: Arts Fest
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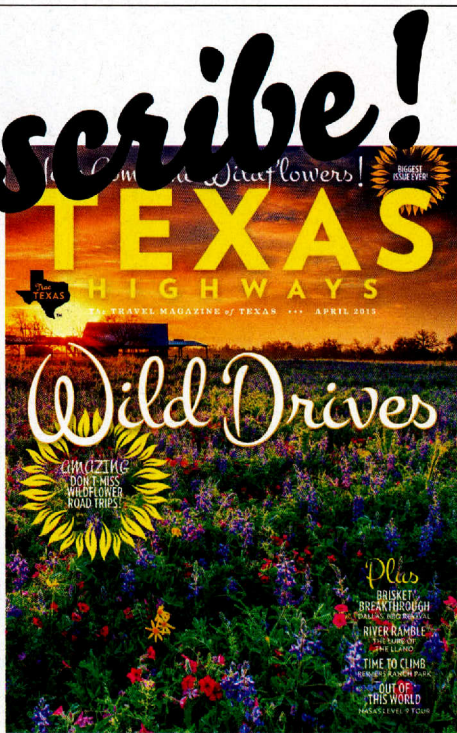
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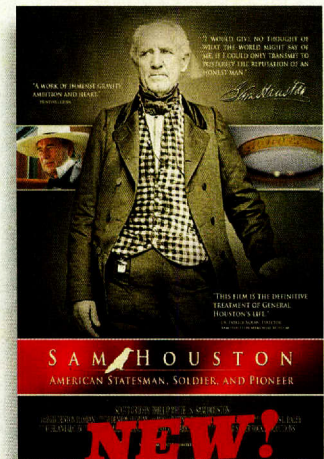
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« continued from page 96 »

Hole Regional Park.
www.wimberleyartsfest.com
512/952-0098

WIMBERLEY: Butterfly Festival April 18. EmilyAnn Theatre and Gardens.
www.emilyann.org
512/847-6969

PANHANDLE PLAINS

ABILENE: ArtWalk April 9. Downtown. 325/677-8389

ALBANY: Cell Series: Natasha Bowdoin February 7-May 23. The Old Jail Art Center.
www.theoldjailartcenter.org
325/762-2269

ALBANY: The Spiritual Image February 7-May 23. The Old Jail Art Center.
www.theoldjailartcenter.org
325/762-2269

ANDREWS: Wild, Wild West Fest April 24-26. ACE Arena. www.andrewsbx.com
432/523-2695

BIG SPRING: Big Spring Powwow April 25-26. Dorothy Garrett Coliseum.
www.facebook.com/BigSpringPowWow
432/935-0125

BUFFALO GAP: Chautauqua Learning Series April 11. Buffalo Gap Historic Village. 325/572-3365

BUFFALO GAP: Craft Sunday April 19. Buffalo Gap Historic Village. 325/572-3365

CANYON: Hunting the Perfect Accessory January 24-January 9, 2016. Panhandle Plains Historical Museum. www.panhandleplains.org 806/651-2244

CROWELL: Star Walk April 18. Copper Breaks State Park. www.tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/copper-breaks/park_events
940/839-4331

EASTLAND: Rip's Ribs Cook Off April 11. Courthouse square. www.ripsribscookoff.com 254/629-2332

GRAFORD: Arte de los Brazos April 11-18. Possum Kingdom Chamber of Commerce. www.artedelosbrazos.com 888/779-8330

GRAHAM: Cars and Stars April 11. www.grahamtexas carshow.com 940/549-0401

LUBBOCK: 45th Annual Ranch Day April 11. National Ranching Heritage Center. www.nrhcc.ttu.edu
806/742-0498

LUBBOCK: Western Federation of Watercolor Societies' 40th Exhibition

April 16-July 15. Museum of Texas Tech University. www.wfws.org 806/742-2490

LUBBOCK: Buffalo Springs Lake IBCA Sanctioned Barbecue Cook-Off April 17-18. Buffalo Springs Lake. www.buffalospingslake.net 806/747-3353

MINERAL WELLS: Palo Pinto County on Tour April 25. Various locations. 940/325-2557

POST: Post Trade Day April 4. Main Street. www.postcitytexas.com 806/495-3461

SAN ANGELO: Cactus Market Days April 18. Across from the historic Cactus Hotel. 325/949-6200

SAN ANGELO: Fort Concho Frontier Day April 25. Fort Concho National Historic Landmark. www.fortconcho.com 325/657-4441

STANTON: Old Sorehead Trade Days April 11-12. Downtown streets and Community Center Complex. www.stantontex.com 432/756-2006

STRAWN: Stars Over Our Park April 18. Palo Pinto Mountains State Park. 254/210-3015

WICHITA FALLS: Red River Wine Festival April 18. J.S. Bridwell Ag Center. www.redriverwinefestival.com 940/781-4953

WINTERS: Memories of Times Past Spring Festival April 18. Z. I. Hale Museum. 325/754-2036

PINEY WOODS

ALTO: Caddo Culture Day April 11. Caddo Mounds State Historic Site. www.visitcaddomounds.com 936/858-3218

CENTER: Bloomin' On The Square April 11. Downtown. www.shelbycounty.chamber.com 936/598-3682

GLADEWATER: Highway 271 Car Cruise April 11. 903/845-5753

GLADEWATER: East Texas Gusher Days April 18. www.gusher-days.com 903/845-5501

GRAPELAND: Battle of the Bands April 24-25. Salmon Lake Park. www.TXBluegrassMusic.com 936/697-5949

HENDERSON: Wildflower Trails April 15-30. www.visithenderson.tx.us 866/650-5529

HENDERSON: Antique Tractor and Engine Show April 17-18. www.visithenderson.tx.us 903/889-2671

HUNTSVILLE: Walker County Fair, Rodeo and Barbecue Cook-Off April 3-10. Walker County Fairgrounds. www.walkercountyfair.com 936/291-8763

HUNTSVILLE: Wine Down, Shop Small April 25. Historic downtown. www.huntsvillemainstreet.gov 936/291-5920

JEFFERSON: Diamond Don's National Vintage Motocross April 16-17. Diamond Don RV Park. www.DiamondDon.com 866/598-2038

JEFFERSON: Jefferson Historical Pilgrimage April 30-May 3. Various venues. www.jefferson-texas.com/events

LONGVIEW: Taste of Longview April 7. Maude Cobb Convention and Activity Complex. 903/452-3286

LONGVIEW: Dalton Days April 11. Longview Fairgrounds Rodeo Arena. www.DaltonDays.com

LONGVIEW: Longview PRCA Rodeo April 17-18. Longview Rodeo Arena. www.longviewrodeo.com 903/757-4444

LONGVIEW: Harvest Festival Crawfish Boil April 25. Maude Cobb Convention and Activity Complex. 903/236-8428

MAGNOLIA: Depot Day April 18. Historic 1902 Depot. www.magnoliatxhistorical society.com 281/356-8514

TYLER: Azalea and Spring Flower Trail March 20-April 5. www.visittyler.com

TYLER: Taste of Tyler April 14. Harvey Convention Center. www.tasteoftyler.com 903/534-9761

WOODVILLE: Tyler County Dogwood Festival April 4. Downtown. www.tylercountydogwoodfestival.org 409/283-2632

PRAIRIES AND LAKES

ARLINGTON: 50th Annual Academy of Country Music Awards April 17-19. Globe Life Park and AT&T Stadium. www.acmcountry.com 817/892-4000

ATHENS: Athens Egg Fest April 11. Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center. www.athenstx.org 903/676-2277

ATHENS: Bird and Nature Walk April 11. Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center. www.athenstx.org 903/676-2277

ATHENS: PRCA Stampede Rodeo April 24-25. Henderson County Regional Fair Park Complex. www.athenstx.org 903/675-5181

BELLVILLE: Austin County Go Texan Crawfish Boil April 4. Austin County Fair Convention and Expo Center. www.austincountyfair.com/go-texan.html 979/627-5727

BELLVILLE: Market Day on the Square April 4. Historic downtown. www.bellville.com 979/865-3407

BELLVILLE: Spring Creek Bluegrass Club Show and Jam April 25. Coushatta Recreational Ranch. www.springcreekbluegrass.com 979/877-9526

BELLVILLE: Fruehling Saengerfest April 26. Concordia Hall. www.texasgermansociety.com 979/865-3804

BONHAM: Red River Art and Wine Fest April 18. Creative Arts Center. www.creativeartscenter.us 903/640-2196

BOWIE: Second Monday Trade Days April 10-12. www.cityofbowietx.com 940/872-4861

BRENNHAM: Art In Blossom April 9. Bullock Ballroom at the Historic Simon Theater. www.bluebonnetgardenclub.com 979/277-4023

BRYAN: Downtown Street and Art Fair April 18. Downtown. www.downtownstreetandartfair.com 979/822-4920

BRYAN: Wine and Roses Festival April 25. Messina Hof Winery and Resort. www.messinahof.com 979/778-9463

BURTON: La Bahia Antiques Show and Sale March 27-April 4. La Bahia Hall. www.labahiaantiques.com 979/289-2684

BURTON: Burton Cotton Gin Festival April 17-18. Texas Cotton Gin Museum. www.cottonginmuseum.org 979/289-3378

CHAPPELL HILL: Official Bluebonnet Festival of Texas April 11-12. Downtown. www.chappellhillmuseum.org 979/836-6033

CLEBURNE/GRANDVIEW: Antique Alley Texas and 30+ Miles of Shopping April 17-18. www.AntiqueAlleyTexas.com 817/240-4948

CLIFTON: The BIG Event April 11. Bosque Arts Center. www.BosqueArtsCenter.org 254/375-3724

DALLAS: *Modern Opulence in Vienna: The Wittgenstein Vitrine* November 15-October 18. Dallas Museum of Art. www.dma.org

DALLAS: *Melvin Edwards: Five Decades* January 31-May 10. Nasher Sculpture Center. www.NasherSculptureCenter.org

DALLAS: *Shiraga/Motonaga: Between Action and the Unknown* February 8-July 19. Dallas Museum of Art. www.dma.org

DALLAS: *The International Exhibition of Sherlock Holmes* February 15-May 10. Perot Museum of Nature and Science. www.perotmuseum.org 214/428-5555

DALLAS: *Concentrations 58: Chosil Kil* February 22-July 19. Dallas Museum of Art. www.dma.org

DALLAS: Dallas Blooms February 28-April 12. Dallas Arboretum. www.dallasarboretum.org

DALLAS: *Michael Borremans: As sweet as it gets* March 15-July 5. Dallas Museum of Art. www.dma.org

DALLAS: First Saturdays at the Nasher Sculpture Center April 4. www.nashersculpturecenter.org

DALLAS: Cool Thursdays Concert Series April 9, 16, 23, 30. Dallas Arboretum. www.dallasarboretum.org 214/515-6500

DALLAS: Dallas Art Fair April 10. Fashion Industry Gallery (f.i.g.) www.fashionindustrygallery.com 214/220-1278

DALLAS: Lecture: Artist Jonathan Hammer April 11. Nasher Sculpture Center. www.NasherSculptureCenter.org 214/242-5159

DALLAS: Turtle Creek Association 2015 Home Tour April 12. Park Creek Place. www.turtlecreekassociation.org 214/526-2800

DECATUR: A Touch of Rust April 25. Wise County Fairgrounds. www.atouchofrust.com 405/255-6519

DENISON: American Strongman Competition April 10. Loose Wheels. www.denisontexas.us

DENISON: Big Texas Breakfast Open House April 18. Eisenhower Birthplace State Historic Site. www.VisitEisenhowerBirthplace.com 903/465-8908

DENTON: *Materials: Hard and Soft* February 6-April 2.

Patterson-Appleton Center for the Visual Arts. www.dentonarts.com 940/382-2787

DENTON: North Texas Horse Country Tour April 4. Historical Park of Denton County. www.horsecountrytours.com 940/382-7895

DENTON: Denton County Heritage Festival April 12. Denton County Courthouse on the Square. www.dentoncounty.com 940/349-2860

DENTON: Denton Redbud Festival April 18. Denton Civic Center and Quakertown Park. www.kdb.org 940/349-8737

DENTON: Denton Arts and Jazz Festival April 24-26. Quakertown Park. www.dentonjazzfest.com 940/565-0931

DESOTO: Spring Concert Series April 12, 19, 26. DeSoto Corner Theater. www.artdesoto.com 972/230-9648

DESOTO: Briarwood Kids' Fishing Tournament April 25. Briarwood Park. 972/230-9650

ELGIN: Art Studio Tour April 18. Historic downtown. www.elgin.tx.com 512/281-5724

ENNIS: NHRA Lucas Oil Divisional April 16-19. Texas Motorplex. www.texasmotorplex.com 972/878-2641

ENNIS: Super Chevy Show April 16-17. Texas Motorplex. www.texasmotorplex.com 972/878-2641

ENNIS: Bluebonnet Trails Festival April 18-19. Downtown. www.visitennis.org 972/878-4748

FARMERSVILLE: Farmers and Fleas Market April 4. Historic Onion Shed. www.farmersvilletx.com 972/784-6846

FORT WORTH: *Audubon's Beasts* January 15-August 2. Amon Carter Museum of American Art. www.cartermuseum.org 817/738-1933

FORT WORTH: *Focus: RongRong&inri* January 31-April 5. Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. www.themodern.org 817/738-9215

FORT WORTH: *American Still Life* February 14-August 2. Amon Carter Museum of American Art. www.cartermuseum.org 817/738-1933

FORT WORTH: *Framing Desire: Photography and Video* February 21-August 23. Modern Art



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www.themodern.org
817/738-9215

FORT WORTH: *Like Father, Like Son: Edward and Brett Weston* February 21–August 23. Amon Carter Museum of American Art. www.cartermuseum.org 817/738-1933

FORT WORTH: *Remington and Russell* February 28–May 24. Amon Carter Museum of American Art. www.cartermuseum.org 817/738-1933

FORT WORTH: *The Collection of Nancy Lee*

and *Perry R. Bass* March 1–May 25. Kimbell Art Museum. www.kimbellart.org 817/332-8451

FORT WORTH: Main Street Arts Festival April 9–12. Downtown. www.mainstreetartsfest.org 817/336-2787

FORT WORTH: Fort Worth Opera Festival April 24–May 10. Bass Hall. www.fwopera.org 817/731-0883

FORT WORTH: Mayfest April 30–May 3. Trinity Park. www.mayfest.org 817/332-1055

FORT WORTH: First Fridays at The Modern April 3. Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth. www.themodern.org 817/738-9215

FRYDEK: Frydek Grotto Celebration April 26. St. Mary's Catholic Church Grounds. 979/885-3131

GARLAND: The Marketplace April 18. Historic downtown. www.downtowngarland.org 972/205-2782

GLEN ROSE: Spring Bluegrass Festival April 2–4. Oakdale Park.

www.oakdalepark.com 254/897-2321

GRANBURY: Granbury Wine Walk April 24–25. Granbury Square Plaza. www.granburywinewalk.com 682/498-3089

GRAND PRAIRIE: Easter Egg-stravaganza April 4. Lynn Creek Park. www.grandfungp.com 817/467-2104

GRAND PRAIRIE: Big Mamou Cajun Festival April 11–12, 18–19. Traders Village. www.tradersvillage.com 972/647-2331

GRAND PRAIRIE: Main Street Fest April 24–25. www.MainStreetFest.com 972/237-8100

GRAND PRAIRIE: Lone Star Swap Meet April 25–26. Traders Village. www.tradersvillage.com 972/647-2331

GRAPEVINE: A Day Out With Thomas April 10–12, 17–19. Grapevine Vintage Railroad. www.HistoricTrains.org 866/468-7630

GRAPEVINE: Blessing of the Vines and the New Vintage Wine and Gallery Trail April 11. Delaney Vineyards and downtown. www.GrapevineTexasUSA.com 817/410-3185

GRAPEVINE: Spring Into Nash Farm April 18. www.NashFarm.org 817/410-3185

GRAPEVINE: ChocolateFest April 24–25. Austin Ranch. www.ChocolateFestGrapevine.org 972/574-4420

HALLETTSVILLE: Texas State Championship Fiddlers Frolics and Songwriters Serenade April 23–26. Knights of Columbus Hall. www.fiddlersfrolics.com

HASLET: Wild West Fest April 17–18. Haslet City Park. www.chute2productions.com 817/228--8144

HICO: Billy the Kid Rides Again Open Car Show April 4. Billy the Kid Museum. www.billythekidmuseum.com 254/796-2523

HICO: Hico Antique Show April 24–25. Downtown. www.sugarmoonantiques.com 254/796-4155

KEMP: Wildflower Festival April 11. Kemp City Hall. www.cityofkemp.org 903/498-3191

KENNEDALE: Kennedale Brickworks Festival: Art in the Park April 17–19. TownCenter Park. www.kennedaleartsfestival.com 817/985-2106

LULING: Oil City Car Show April 11. Luling Oil Museum. www.oilmuseum.org 830/875-1922

LULING: Roughneck Chili and Barbecue Cook-Off April 11. Luling Oil Museum. www.oilmuseum.org 830/875-3214 ext. 4

MCKINNEY: Arts in Bloom April 11. Downtown. www.DowntownMcKinney.com 972/547-2660

MCKINNEY: Second Saturday Bird Walk April 11. Heard Natural Science

Museum & Wildlife Sanctuary. www.heardmuseum.org 972/562-5566

MCKINNEY: Old Red Lumberyard and Treasure Spotters April 17–18. Flour Mill District. www.visitmckinney.com 214/544-1407

MCKINNEY: Second Saturday on the Downtown Square April 11. Historic downtown square. www.downtownmckinney.com 972/547-2660

MCKINNEY: Third Monday Trade Days April 17–19. www.tmtd.com 972/562-5466

MESQUITE: Joy Schumaker Exhibition April 1–29. Mesquite Arts Center Main Gallery. www.mesquiteartscenter.org 972/216-6444

MESQUITE: N'awlins Gumbo Kings in Concert April 3. Mesquite Arts Center. www.mesquiteartscenter.org 972/216-6444

MESQUITE: Real. Texas. Festival. April 24–25. Rodeo Center. www.realtexasfestival.com 972/216-6499

PLANO: Trinkets to Treasures April 11. Plano Centre. www.jlcollincountry.org 972/769-0557

PLANTERSVILLE: Quilt Show April 24–25. St. Mary's Catholic Church. www.stmarysquiltshow.com 936/890-2128

RICHARDSON: *Comer Collection: Of Nature* March 27–April 24. University of Texas at Dallas. www.utdallas.edu 972/883-2787

ROUND TOP: Spring Original Round Top Antique Fair April 1–4. Big Red Barn Event Center. www.roundtoptexasantiques.com

ROUND TOP: Poetry Festival at Round Top April 17–19. Festival Hill. www.festivalhill.org 979/249-3129

SALADO: Texas Packard Meet April 10–12. Stagecoach Inn. www.texaspackardmeet.com 210/497-6836

SEALY: Sealy KC Cajun Crawfish Festival April 24–25. Knights of Columbus Hall. www.sealykofc.org 979/885-6370

SEGUIN: Earth Day/Trade Days April 25. Central Park. www.visitseguin.com 830/401-5000

SHERMAN: Second Saturday at Hagerman NWR

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April 11. Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge. www.friendsofhagerman.com/ Activities 903/786-2826

SHERMAN: Dia Celebration! April 30. Sherman Public Library. www.ci.sherman.tx.us 903/892-7240

THE COLONY: Spring Eggstravaganza April 2. The Colony Five Star Complex. www.visitthecolonytx.com 972/625-1106

WACO: Magic School Bus Kicks Up a Storm January 17-April 12. Mayborn Museum Complex. www.maybornmuseum.com 254/710-1110

WACO: Celebrate Waco April 11. Downtown on Austin Avenue. www.facebook.com/celebratewaco 254/754-0851

WAXAHACHIE: Scarborough Renaissance Festival April 4-May 25. Off I-35 East at Exit 399 and Exit 399-A. www.srfestival.com 972/938-3247

WILLS POINT: Junk Rodeo Vintage Market and Shindig April 17-18. Rodeo Grounds. www.junkrodeo.com 214/886-6953

SOUTH TEXAS PLAINS

CARRIZO SPRINGS: Bullnanza April 25. 830/876-5205

GOLIAD: 19th-Century Trade Day April 11. Presidio La Bahia. www.presidio labahia.org 361/645-3752

HELOTES: San Antonio Highland Games and Celtic Music Festival April 11-12. Helotes Festival Grounds. www.sahga.org 210/833-2954

MCALEN: Danville Chadbourne Recent Works

Exhibit December 18-April 12. The International Museum of Art and Science. www.imasonline.org 956/682-0123

POTEET: Poteet Strawberry Festival April 10-12. Strawberry Festival Grounds. www.strawberryfestival.com

RIO GRANDE CITY: Keepin' it Rio Market Days April 4. The Kiosk on Britton Avenue. 956/487-3476

SAN ANTONIO: Firearms of the Texas Frontier: Flintlock to Cartridge Through April 15. The Alamo. www.thealamo.org 210/225-1391

SAN ANTONIO: *Fait Accompli* December 17-May 10. McNay Art Museum. www.mcnayart.org 210/824-5368

SAN ANTONIO: *Regarding Ruscha* January 21-May 17. McNay Art Museum. www.mcnayart.org 210/824-5368

SAN ANTONIO: Rainforest Adventure Maze March 7-September 20. San Antonio Botanical Garden. www.sabot.org 210/207-3255

SAN ANTONIO: 2015 San Antonio Book Festival April 11. Central Library. www.sapl.org/festival 210/207-2500

SAN ANTONIO: National Juried Show—Texas Watercolor Society April 12-May 28. Radius Building. www.texaswatercolorociety.org 830/401-0153

SAN ANTONIO: Fiesta San Antonio April 16-26. Various venues. www.fiesta-sa.org 210/227-5191

SAN ANTONIO: *Visits to the Past* Alamo Plaza Heritage Interpretation April 18. Alamo Plaza. www.salha.org

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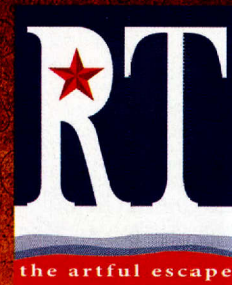
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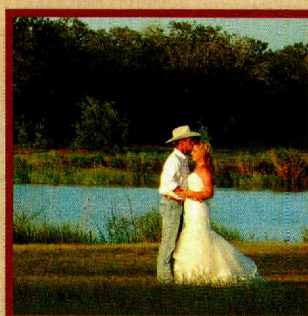
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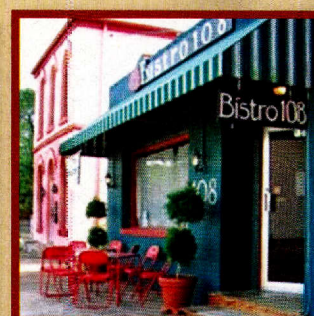
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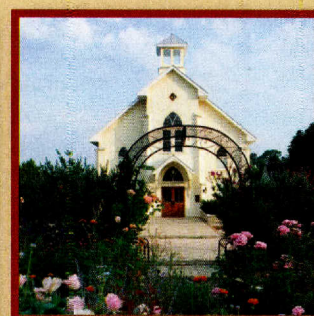
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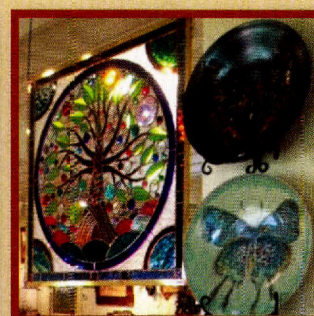
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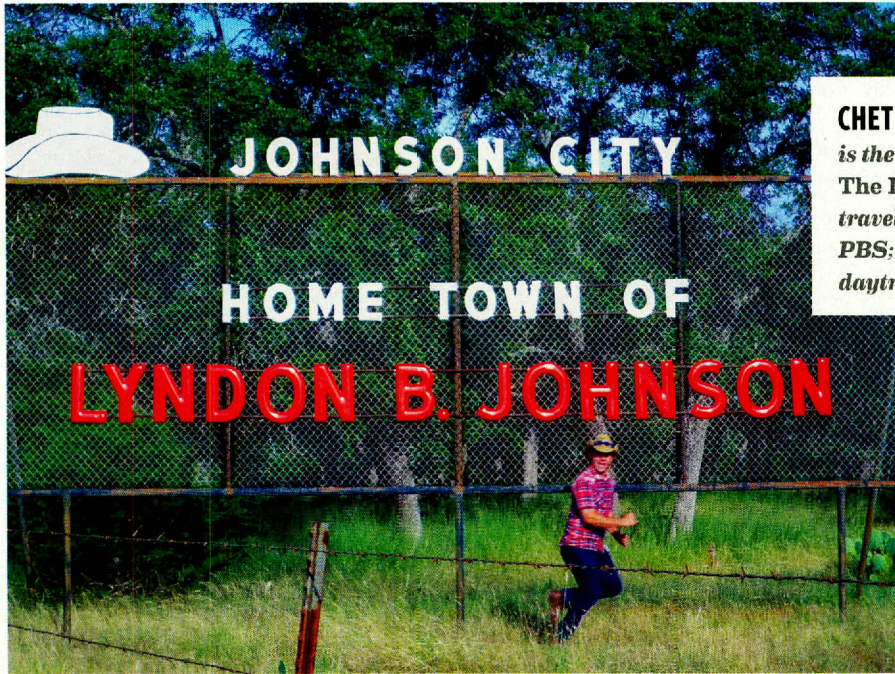
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in the wallpapered dining room and holding cabinet meetings on the lawn.

2:30 P.M. At the adjoining state park, I stopped at the **Sauer-Beckmann Farmstead**, a refurbished 1915 homestead where life goes on much like it did at the turn of the century. Cows get milked, pigs get

slopped, and butter gets churned, all while visitors like me look on befuddled that folks actually lived that way.

3:30 P.M. For a meatier throwback, I headed to **Whittington's Jerky**, which has been smoking daytrip-ready meat sticks for more than 50 years. I filled up on samples of beef, turkey, and pork jerky in various varieties from mild to tear-jerker spicy, then grabbed a pouch of garlic beef jerky to stock up for my upcoming hike.

4:30 P.M. I headed to **Pedernales Falls State Park**, a rustic wilderness situated on the river where the water cascades over a series of limestone shelves as it drops into sky-blue pools. Because of the flash-flood risk, there's no swimming on the falls, but downriver I found a quiet stretch of water and basked in the sun until it faded away behind the tall oaks and cypress trees.

7:00 P.M. Back in town, I stopped at **Pecan Street Brewing**, across from the stately Blanco County Courthouse. I moseyed up to a pint of "1897 Jailbreak IPA" (offered occasionally), which recalls the old stone jailhouse next door. My lamb burger topped with whipped feta and pepperoncinis was far from ordinary, and close to incredible.

As I reflected on the day, it became clear that Johnson City is not only home to big personalities, but also big tales, big appetites, and big adventures. So, whether you follow my footsteps or forge your own path, I hope to see you on the road. ★

The Johnson City Treatment

Texas is synonymous with big, partly because of its land mass, but also because of its big personalities. And through the ages, few have been bigger than Lyndon B. Johnson, the 36th President of the United States. I tripped to his Hill Country home to follow in the footsteps of this Texas legend.

9:00 A.M. My first stop was the **Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park**, broken up into three different areas with the **Johnson Settlement** and **Boyhood Home** right in the middle of Johnson City. The first thing I learned was that the city isn't named for LBJ, but rather a family member who helped establish the town in the late 1800s. I roamed the open paths of the **Johnson Settlement**, peering into the log cabin that harkens back to the days when LBJ's grandfather ran cattle up the Chisholm Trail.

10:00 A.M. I walked over to LBJ's **Boyhood Home**, a quaint, one-story house on a site occupying an entire block with its yard, barn, and windmill. The half-dozen interior rooms told the story of a young LBJ playing baseball and getting into mischief, but also showing his early political interests; he often hid under the floorboards to eavesdrop on his father's political discussions and debated current events at the dinner table.

11:30 A.M. The **Hill Country Cupboard** boasts the "world's best chicken fried steak, nearly 3 dozen sold." Who could resist such a claim? My "chicken-fried" was crispy and juicy with the mashed potatoes and fried okra serving as perfect sidekicks.

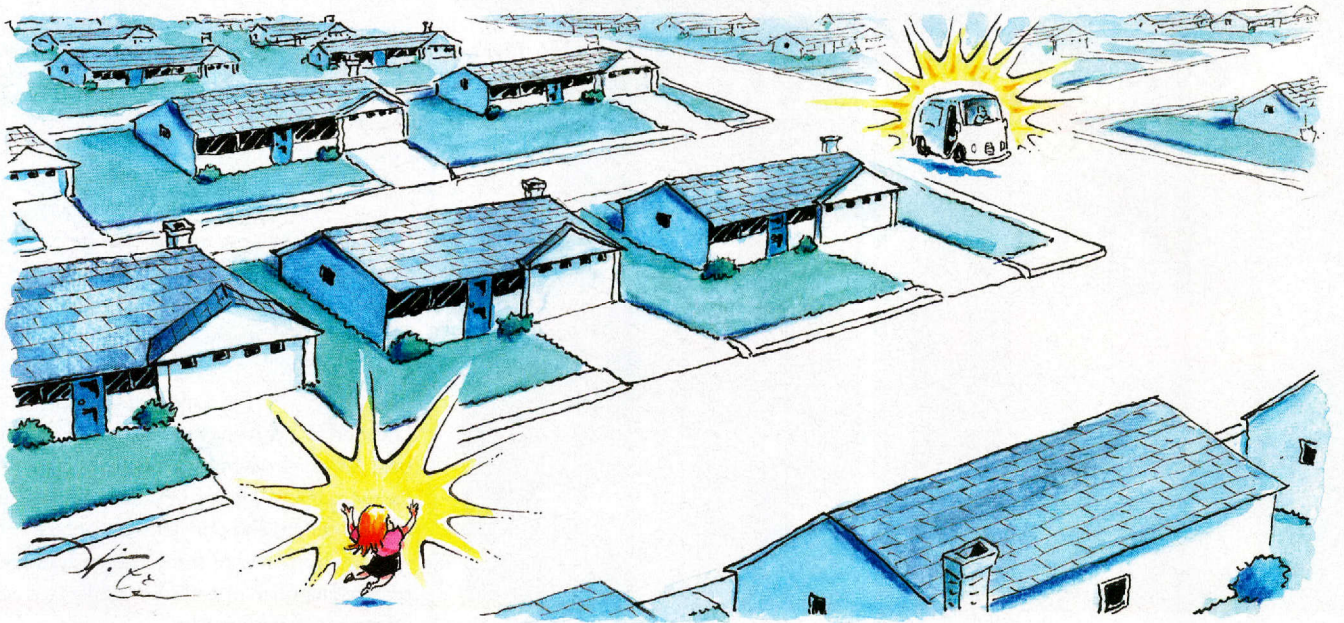
12:30 P.M. I drove west to nearby Stonewall for the main attraction of the National Park—the **LBJ Ranch**. I picked up an audio CD at the visitors center and set off on a driving tour of the ranch. While LBJ was president, countless dignitaries and heads of state visited the ranch, often getting personal tours from the front seat of LBJ's convertible Lincoln. We passed the ranch's cattle operations, private airstrip, and LBJ's final resting place under the shade of beautiful oaks near the Pedernales River. The tour concluded inside LBJ's home, dubbed the "Texas White House," where the park ranger shared stories of Lyndon and Lady Bird's life at the ranch, hosting dinners



Contact the Johnson City Chamber of Commerce,
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TravelMatters

THE LIGHTER SIDE OF TRAVELING



Lost and Found

LEARNING TO CHERISH MOMENTS OF UNCERTAINTY

text by **Barbara Rodriguez** illustration by **Michael Witte**

WHEN I WAS SIX YEARS old I got lost.

An older girl whom I didn't know came skipping by my house and invited me to hers. I dutifully followed her, crossing many streets—breaking all

the rules—until we paused at the end of a driveway. Then she dashed into the house and slammed the door. No amount of knocking produced a response. After a few minutes, I squared my shoulders and determined to find my way home.

That proved impossible. We lived on Sheppard Air Force Base and all the houses looked alike. I walked and walked, then sat down on a curb to cry. That's when I heard the familiar rattle: Ernie was coming. Everyone knew Ernie. He delivered crisply starched uniforms right to our doors. His white van was as familiar as the Popsicle truck.

I gave Ernie my father's name and rank and he immediately delivered me to my anxious mother. Soon after the tears dried, the day became an adventure I bragged about.

It was 20 years before I got lost again. My husband and I had met up with our best friends for a getaway on a ranch outside

Buda. We wandered a riverbank whiling away the day and soon stumbled through cedar thickets, yakking and laughing as we lost track of time. When we finally stopped chattering long enough to note the sun hovering above the horizon, we realized we were lost.

I didn't remember Ernie then, although I should have when we first recognized the rumbling of a truck somewhere close. We headed for the sound and found a small man methodically emptying his truck bed of feed corn. We introduced ourselves and explained our predicament. Stone-faced and silent, he sized us up. Then he laughed. Belly-laughed.

He kindly offered to take us where we belonged if we could tolerate bumping along as he finished up his chores. When he dropped us off, we built a bonfire of gratitude and sat beneath the stars.

In the age of GPS and cell phones, it is no longer easy to get lost. Sometimes, navigators lead me wrong, and sometimes, I leave the path on purpose. I try to cherish moments of uncertainty. I sometimes think that with so much sure-footedness these days, we may have lost the chance to chart our own adventures. ★

Soon after the tears dried, the day became an adventure I bragged about.

Find Babs Rodriguez's full adventure at texashighways.com/matters.

*Rear***VIEW**

ONE LAST THOUGHT

“My heart found its home
long ago in the beauty,
mystery, order, and disorder
of the flowering earth.”

—Lady Bird Johnson in a 1966 speech

APRIL BLOOMS often include Texas paintbrush, such as this one on a ranch near Refugio.

PHOTO: © Rolf Nussbaumer

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Photo courtesy of Aquatica, SeaWorld's Waterpark.

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