First Come, First Served

It's time once again for the next round of proposals for free exhibit space in the lobbies of several Texas Travel Information Centers. TxDOT will accept applications June 1-20 from regional tourism organizations and greater metropolitan areas wishing to publicize their attractions during the period of September 2001 through February 2002. The free promotional program is offered on a six-month rotating basis, and affords an added opportunity to attract a portion of the close to 3 million visitors who stop at the TICs each year. Participants will be selected from qualifying applicants based on date and time of receipt. For details, call the Travel Services office at 512/486-5800.

Schlitterbahn Beach Waterpark, the first Schlitterbahn venture outside New Braunfels, will open this summer on South Padre Island. The Dallas Morning News reports the new attraction will become the first American water park with a Brazilian beach theme, complete with thatched-roof buildings, hundreds of palm trees, Latin music and spicy South American cuisine. The $13 million park boasts 11 attractions, including Master Blaster uphill water coasters, a triple-wave, body-boarding ride, a wave pool, an activity pool, sand volleyball courts, five beaches, and a five-story sand castle with four water slides. The park is being built on the beach facing the Gulf of Mexico on a 26-acre site on the northern portion of Isla Blanca Park. For updates, call 956/772-SURF.

A 175-acre tract adjacent to Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park in Mission will become home to the World Birding Center when it opens in 2003. The project, now in the design phase, is being directed by Texas Parks and Wildlife. The Lower Rio Grande Valley is known by experts as one of the hemisphere’s most important bird migration routes, through which millions of birds migrate to and from North, Central and South America. Birders in Starr, Hidalgo, Cameron and Willacy counties have recorded 484 different bird species, more than all other U.S. states combined. But years of agricultural clearing and urban expansion have threatened the Valley’s ecology, eliminating 95 percent of the area’s native brush. Through the World Birding Center in Mission and a string of resource and information centers from South Padre Island to Roma, supporters aim to protect and restore one of the nation’s richest yet most threatened ecological regions, while creating jobs and economic opportunity through sustainable nature tourism. For details, call 956/584-9156.

The Southwest School of Art and Craft in San Antonio will mark the sesquicentennial of its historic structure with a celebration and grand opening of a new visitors center museum on September 23. The former Ursuline Convent and Academy, which housed the school, opened on the banks of the San Antonio River in 1851. The museum will pay homage to the city’s first school for girls and its evolvement into one of the few professional-quality, non-degree-granting art schools in the nation. Visitors can also enjoy exhibitions of fine contemporary art, shopping for functional and decorative art, and lunch at the school’s Copper Kitchen restaurant. At 300 Augusta Street. For updates, call 210/224-1848.

Work continues on the new $30 million Charles W. Eisemann Center for Performing Arts and Corporate Presentations at the Galatyn Park Urban Center in Richardson. The facility will include a 350-seat theater for small events, and a larger 1,500-seat theater acoustically engineered for symphony concerts, drama and dance. Grand opening is scheduled for May or June 2002.

PLACES

Rose Hill Country Theater near Henderson will open on April 21 as East Texas’ newest outdoor entertainment venue. Beginning at 7 p.m., headliner Tracey Lawrence will share the stage with Chad Brock and Lance Allen for a four-and-a-half hour concert of non-stop country/Western music. Each
**TEXAS TRAVEL LOG**

**TRAVEL TALES OVERHEARD**

**ANTHONY TIC** Gov. Rick Perry called a press conference last month at TxDOT's El Paso District office, seeking support on various transportation issues. At the invitation of the district PIO, TIC manager Lucia Cordova was in the audience, daughters in tow. The governor later spent time with Serena, Lucia's eldest, answering the young girl's slew of questions and talking with her about the importance of education. When Lucia told him about her work at the center, the governor said he, too, was interested in promoting tourism.

**ORANGE TIC** Manager Becky Wilson and staff have teamed up with Texas Parks and Wildlife biologist Derreck Walter to help educate area schoolchildren about the many facets of Texas. While counselors share their enthusiasm about the state's colorful past and the many fun things to do, Derreck teaches the kids about South east Texas plants and wildlife, which often includes visual aids such as live alligators and snakes. "The children have generated local awareness of our center by telling their parents about their experiences," Becky said.

**TEXAS TRAVEL LOG**

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Ann Kelton, Editor

Contributing Editors: Dan Mullen, John Russell, Mike Talley

Design/Layout: Kirsti Harms

month through September will bring top-name entertainment. The 40' x 40' covered stage was built at the bottom of a three-hundred-yard wide crater that gently slopes to sixty feet deep. Crater walls resonate stereophonic-like sound, precision-tuned by nature. The relaxed, picnic-style setting invites audiences to bring lawn chairs and blankets. A limited number of stage-side seats are available for an additional fee.

South of town, off U.S. 299, west on F.M. 1798. For ticket information, call 903/998-2933 or 1-800-550-6922.

The storm that hit Galveston Island last month was accompanied by titanic winds that ripped loose the concrete moorings of a huge oil rig anchored directly across the ship channel from the 1877 tall ship Elissa. The freed rig made its way across the channel, targeted directly for the historic barque, docked at Pier 21. An immediate call to harbor patrol brought out "practically every tugboat in the area." Approximately 16 mighty tugs pushed and pulled the gigantic rig until it no longer threatened Texas' most cherished nautical treasure.

The Antique Sewing Machine Museum, at 804 W. Abram Street in Arlington, closed its doors in November 2000, when owner Frank Smith lost his lease. If the museum reopen at a new location, we’ll let you know.

Leave it to Joe Slocum, in the Travel Division's Travel Information Systems Management office, who's famous for his knowledge of Texas facts and obscurities and for his uncanny ability to track down the darnedest things. During one of his recent searches, he stumbled upon a "Weird Web Site" that bills itself as "Your on-line guide to offbeat tourist attractions." As you can well imagine, Texas took up its share of space. Here is a sampling of what may or may not be added to the Texas State Travel Guide:

- A statue of a huge pair of legs, south of Amarillo on I-27; also in Amarillo,
- the Texas Tornado Museum, complete with authentic tornado debris; the burial site of an alien pilot, in Aurora Cemetery west of Rhome, who crashed his UFO there in 1897; the water tower in Oatmeal, that looks like a box of oatmeal; a giant saxophone constructed of Volkswagen hoods, in front of Billy Blues, a southwest Houston nightclub; and "The World's Largest Rattlesnake," coiled up in front of the Freer Chamber of Commerce.

For other unusual attractions, key in www.roadsideamerica.com.

**U.S. TRAVEL**

A recent survey conducted for Hilton Hotels revealed spring break has become the new holiday travel season for families, who head for ski slopes, sunny beaches and familiar places. The Dallas Morning News reports American families have traditionally used summer, Thanksgiving and the December holidays for vacations. And while summertime is still ranked as the prime time for travel, the frenzy of Thanksgiving and Christmas has families with children looking for alternatives. "It's come to the point that any time kids are out of school, it's not the off-season," one travel agent said. Beach hotels, ski resorts and cruises sell out, airlines book up quickly, and theme parks are packed.

Last year, when most major airlines reported losses or lower profits because of high jet fuel prices, labor problems and poor weather, net income at Dallas-based Southwest Airlines soared 27.1 percent. This year, during its 30th anniversary year, Southwest will add 25 new planes to its fleet of 344. Boeing 737s. The carrier plans to install all-leather seats in its entire fleet and add canyon blue to its trademark paint scheme of red, orange and gold. The existing fleet will be retrofitted over the next 10 years, beginning in July. The Dallas Morning News reports the changes signal the airline's evolving identity beyond its roots in Texas and the Southwest.

**HISTORY**

On March 6, 1836, an army of 5,000 Mexican soldiers stormed the Alamo in San Antonio, killing some 189 Texian defenders. Today, 165 years

**HERO'S WELCOME**

The Pearl Harbor Survivors Association named the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg as the site of the official mainland commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Festivities slated for Friday, December 7, 2001, will include a flyover by vintage WWII planes, a special ceremony with nationally known speakers, and an old-fashioned heroes' parade, led by grand marshal John Finn, the last living Medal of Honor winner from Pearl Harbor. The National Museum of the Pacific War, formerly the Admiral Nimitz Museum, is the only museum in the world dedicated to telling the story of World War II in the Pacific. Open daily at 304 E Main Street. For details, call 830/997-4379, ext. 228.
later, it’s hard to tell fiction from truth. The Dallas Morning News reports an explosion of new research has the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, caretakers of the Alamo, working to balance legend with fact. For years visitors have heard the story of how the small band of Texians died in their fight for freedom. Now they will also learn that land, not protection of liberty, brought some defenders to Texas, and that William Barret Travis probably did not draw the famous line in the sand. Few realize that it was a battle that pitted brother against brother, that many Mexican soldiers were sympathetic to the Texians’ cause, and that among the Alamo’s defenders were native-born Tejanos who died alongside Anglos and others of European descent. Besides the usual array of souvenirs, the gift shop sells copies of a Mexican officer’s diary, which says Davy Crockett didn’t die fighting but surrendered and was executed instead. Over the years, the Alamo has come to mean different things to different people, symbolizing for some heroism and sacrifice, for some a division between different people, symbolizing for others a struggle between a dominant white culture and a defeated Mexican culture. The Daughters aim to make the story of the Alamo relevant to all Texans, not just a select few. The group is busy raising the $650,000 needed for construction of a new education center in the Alamo gardens, and renovation of a 19th-Century mercantile building across the street for offices and new in-service training programs. There teachers will learn how to convey schoolchildren a more accurate and complete history of Texas’ most famous shrine.

Large 6-by-8 foot map, begun by Stephen F. Austin in 1833, outlines the settlements of Austin’s second colony. The Dallas Morning News reports the document was among 16 historic maps returned to Texas after miraculous restoration by the Northeast Document Conservation Center in Andover, Massachusetts, one of the top paper conservator firms in the nation. The historic treasures come under the care of the Texas General Land Office in Austin, home of more than 35 million documents and maps containing information about land grants and transactions dating back to the 1700s when Texas was part of Spain. The 16 restored maps were the first to benefit from the state agency’s adopt-a-map program, launched last year to raise $500,000 for the preservation of approximately 500 of the state’s oldest and most vulnerable maps. The maps, most of them cracked and fading, represent an amazing wealth of Texas history. They are also the basis for all land ownership, dating from Spanish colonial days. Surveyors, title lawyers, oil companies, and anyone else dealing with land and mineral rights in Texas still work with original documents hand drawn more than 100 years ago. As the maps are repaired, they will be returned to general use. The Land Office will scan the preserved maps and make them available on its Web site in about six months. For more information, call Elna Christopher at 512/463-5169.

MUSEUMS

At the request of the president and first lady, the El Paso Museum of Art will lend one of Tom Lea’s most celebrated paintings to the White House for long-term display. Painted in 1954, “Rio Grande” is one of the artist’s classic landscapes showing the Rio Grande amidst the dramatic sky, desert and mountains near El Paso, where the artist was born and spent most of his career. Tom Lea was one of the Southwest’s most prolific and respected American landscape artists, painting numerous public murals throughout the U.S. and illustrating books by writers such as J. Frank Dobie. He served as an artist-correspondent for Life magazine during World War II, and later wrote two best-selling novels and a two-volume history of the King Ranch. He died at age 93 in January of this year. The El Paso Museum of Art is open Tuesday through Sunday at One Arts Festival Plaza. For more info, call 915/532-1707.

Moving in

The FAST LANE

Six Flags AstroWorld in Houston opened the season with a new Fast Lane reservation system, allowing guests easy access to four of the park’s most popular attractions. Visitors simply make a reservation, return at their specified time, then immediately hop aboard their favorite ride. The new no-lines, no-waiting option is available at Serial Thriller, Texas Cyclone, Batman the Escape and Ozarka Splash. For operating hours and ticket information, call 713/799-8404.

Texas Trivia

Which Texas author created Conan the Barbarian?

The famous line in the sand was drawn at what battle?

Which Texas author created Conan the Barbarian?

In the February issue of Texas Travel Log, we reported The Sixth Floor Museum in the former Texas School Book Depository in Dallas will double its exhibition space by expanding to the seventh floor. That project is scheduled for completion by late fall. Now plans are in the works to renovate the railroad switching tower off Dealey Plaza, as part of a proposed $1.8 million improvement project. The Dallas Morning News reports officials are hoping to protect the structure that may have played a role in the Kennedy assassination. The tower earned its place among several conspiracy theories, after Lee Bowers, who was at the controls of the switching station on November 22, 1963, told Warren Commission investigators he saw two men on his side of the picket fence, and that he had witnessed some “commotion … which was out of the ordinary” at the moment of the shooting. His testimony has been cited by conspiracy theorists as evidence that a second gunman aided Lee Harvey Oswald in Kennedy’s death. The Texas Historical Commission has pledged $30,000 to restore the tower to its 1963 condition. Officials will raise the rest of the money by applying for local grants. Completion is scheduled for 2003, the 40th anniversary of the assassination. Open daily at 411 Elm Street. For updates, call 214/474-6660.
| NUMBERS | | | | | |
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| TRAVEL CENTER | Month Visitors | Percent Variation* | Visitors Year-to-date | Percent Variation* |
| AMARILLO | 11,733 | -15.93 | 26,265 | -15.21 |
| ANTHONY | 17,445 | +23.78 | 48,357 | +40.86 |
| DENISON | 29,079 | +4.93 | 61,713 | -5.95 |
| GAINESVILLE | 33,846 | -7.68 | 75,252 | -10.27 |
| LANGTRY | 10,380 | -10.11 | 22,818 | -16.01 |
| LAREDO | 9,147 | +0.03 | 23,340 | -0.31 |
| ORANGE | 48,708 | +0.37 | 121,065 | +3.42 |
| TEXARKANA | 33,717 | +6.54 | 84,972 | +8.28 |
| VALLEY | 39,462 | +34.13 | 137,049 | +35.50 |
| WASKOM | 34,368 | -29.22 | 78,054 | -22.96 |
| WICHITA FALLS | 16,587 | -11.27 | 38,691 | -17.76 |
| CAPITOL | 15,147 | +37.05 | 31,530 | +38.13 |
| CENTER TOTALS | 299,619 | -0.46 | 749,106 | +2.17 |

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Dial toll-free 1-800-452-9292 for travel assistance from TxDOT’s Texas Travel Information Centers (8 a.m.–6 p.m. daily, Central Time)

Internet address: www.traveltex.com
www.texashighways.com
www.dontmesswithtexas.org

Data as of March 31, 2001
*Compared to last year

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