

## INSIDE:

- ★ Pompeii exhibit includes artifacts, human casts to tell story of an eruption
- ★ Buffalo Soldiers celebrate place in Texas history and launch educational series
- ★ Tropical Trail Region is subject of new brochure

## TRAVEL NEWS

**T**HE OCCASION of Valentine's Day and an annual 200-couple wedding ceremony at the Arneson River Theater served as a idyllic backdrop for the unveiling of **San Antonio's new branding** and logo: **San Antonio. Deep. In the Heart.** During the mass wedding ceremony, four decorated boats paraded through the river representing the four pillars of the city's new brand — people, pride, promise and passion. The new branding is meant to embrace the spirit and pride of the citizens and culture while focusing on the four key elements.

"In today's world, travelers are looking for true experiences — real environments — and San Antonio is the perfect answer for this quest," says Scott White, executive director of the San Antonio Convention and Visitors Bureau. "Here, authenticity is everywhere — through our deep-rooted history and big-hearted multicultural diversity. Those of us who live here feel this pride and passion deeply; our visitors will as well when they experience the warm embrace of a modern city that honors its history."

The new branding launch will include a national advertising campaign and a new Web site, [www.visitsanantonio.com](http://www.visitsanantonio.com). Both avenues will highlight "attractions for every passion" including historical attractions, arts and culture options, food and wine destinations, as well as family fun, romance and sports/outdoor possibilities.

**I**N AN EFFORT to improve its competitive edge, the **Dallas City Council voted to buy an 8.34-acre tract of land** that could house a much-needed **hotel adjacent to the city's convention center**. The Big D's convention business has been sagging with growing competition from newer convention facilities, and this "yes" vote authorizes spending \$500,000 in Dallas Convention & Visitors Bureau money

**L**ITTLE precipitation during the September – November germination period could mean fewer **wildflowers** this season for some areas of the state, but that's not to say there won't be anything to see. Sightings on wildflower Web sites show there will **still be much to see**.

All is not lost. "There are some still out there and some areas of the state have received better precipitation than others," says Texas Department of Transportation's Director of Vegetation Management, Dennis Markwardt.

"If we start getting some more precipitation, we can still have a good perennial wildflower season," he says.

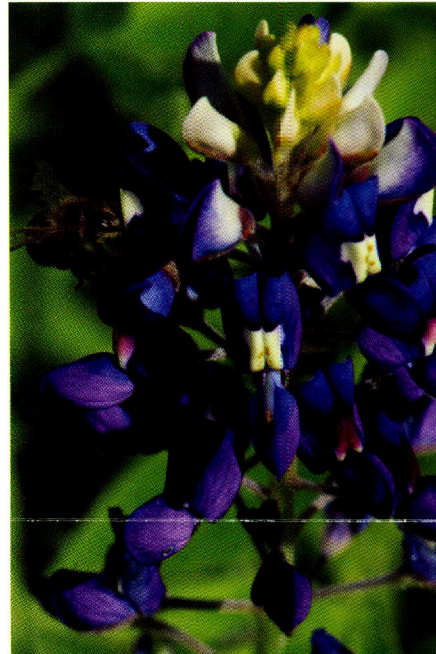
Big Bend has experienced some snow in December and rain in January, but, according to its wildflower report on [www.desertusa.com/wildflo/tx.html](http://www.desertusa.com/wildflo/tx.html), it has not been enough to fuel mass flowering.

To follow the progress, visit the following for wildflower reports and sightings:

- Texas Department of Transportation Wildflower Hotline, [www.txdot.gov/travel/flora\\_conditions.htm](http://www.txdot.gov/travel/flora_conditions.htm)

to secure a contract for the space currently being used as a parking lot. The contract would give City Hall through Sept. 30 to purchase the property at a fixed price of \$40 million, according to Asst. City Manager A.C. Gonzalez. "While there are some other properties adjacent to the Convention Center that we've looked at, this is not only adjacent, but in the center of gravity of the Convention Center itself. It's also close to and open to the center core of downtown, which makes it very attractive," Gonzalez told the *Dallas Morning News*. CVB president and CEO Phillip Jones says there are at least 80 groups, representing \$800 mil-

## BLOOM WATCH



- East Texas Spring Flower Report, [www.easttexasguide.com/features/flowers](http://www.easttexasguide.com/features/flowers)
- Wild about Texas Wildflowers, [www.lone-star.net/wildflowers/sightings.htm](http://www.lone-star.net/wildflowers/sightings.htm)
- Wildflower Haven, [www.wildflowerhaven.com](http://www.wildflowerhaven.com)

**O**NE WILDFLOWER extravaganza not dependent on the weather is **Texas Highways** magazine's annual **April wildflower issue**, due out on newsstands on March 13.

"Texas Highways readers anticipate the annual April wildflower issue almost as much as they look forward to seeing the year's first bluebonnets," says magazine editor Charles Lohrmann. "The April 2008 wildflower issue — with more than 18 pages of brilliant wildflower photography — gives everyone a reason to celebrate the colorful legacy of Lady Bird Johnson."

In addition to the inspiring landscapes, the April issue also celebrates Austin's favorite hike and bike trail along Lady Bird Lake (Town Lake), another of Lady Bird's beautification projects that inspire thousands of Texans (and visitors) every day.

lion in direct spending, who have said they wouldn't consider hosting an event in Dallas until a convention center hotel was under construction." Dallas Mayor Tom Leppert says the large tract of land offers the possibility of offering even more than just a hotel, including shops and restaurants. Aside from the price of land, the hotel, alone, could cost between \$200 and \$300 million. Tom Garcia, managing director of the Adolphus Hotel says "Dallas has lost its competitive edge. If we don't keep building on and expanding to make the convention center more usable for our customers, it will just sit empty and die a slow death."

**T**HE TEXAS Tourism team from the **Office of the Governor, Economic Development and Tourism Division** netted a win for **online branding** at Media magazine's fourth annual **Creative Media Awards**. The Texas Tourism's Maps campaign's success was measured by the way the agency used digital media to successfully showcase the state in a more multi-dimensional way and to help the potential visitor get a preview of expectations. More specifically, in the Maps campaign, print ads are linked to a [www.TravelTex.com](http://www.TravelTex.com) Web page that is unique to that ad content. There, the curious can find out more about elements of a potential trip, including cultural

FROM THE ASHES



COURTESY MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, HOUSTON

This fresco, *Scene of Initiation Rites* (circa 70-60 B.C.), comes from the *Villa of the Mysteries*, a well-preserved ruin of a Roman villa in Pompeii.

FROM THEIR finery to their final hours, the citizens and the town instantly buried by 10 feet of ash from **Mt. Vesuvius** are the subject of **Pompeii: Tales from an Eruption**, an international exhibit that makes its last stop at the **Museum of Fine Arts, Houston** from March 2 to June 22. In their final terrifying hours on August 24 and 25, A.D. 79, residents of Pompeii and the nearby coastal towns tried to escape,

though many did not. The thriving, prosperous communities lay buried — silenced and forgotten — for 1,700 years before being rediscovered through excavations, which revealed that this horrific tragedy had preserved a wealth of information about the people, their belongings, and how they lived.

An unprecedented number of works of art and objects from the affluent community have been preserved.

The exhibition includes about 240 objects from Pompeii, including a full-length statue of Apollo; more than 100 each from Herculaneum and Oplontis; and about 20 from Terzigno. Bronze and marble sculptures, large-scale frescoes, jewelry, tools, table silver, armor, coins, and even skeletons and plaster casts of the bodies of the victims now tell the stories of life at the Bay of Naples in the days of the early Roman Empire.

"Houston is fortunate to be one of the few venues in the world to show this heartrending and yet uplifting exhibition," says Peter C. Marzio, MFAH director. "It speaks at once to man's creativity and achievement — in the first century and in the years of ongoing excavations — and to our fears. This exhibition offers visitors the rare opportunity to see a number of objects being shown for the first time outside of Italy and to contemplate the lives and the world of the people who owned them."

The eruption also preserved the remains of about 2,000 residents. Italian archaeologist Giuseppe Fiorelli, who recognized cavities in the hardened layers of ash as places where bodies had been, developed the method of filling them with plaster to recreate casts of Pompeians in their final moments.

For information about tickets to *Pompeii: Tales from an Eruption*, call (713) 639-7771 or visit [www.mfah.org](http://www.mfah.org).

tourism, golf, shopping, outdoor adventures, water parks/theme parks and entertainment.

DRURY HOTELS has snagged a deal to convert **San Antonio's historic Aztec Theater** into a **700-seat concert venue** — a la Branson, Mo., and Grand Ole Opry called **San Antonio Rose Live** — which is slated to open this summer. The goal is to turn San Antonio into a major music destination, as well as increase business and visitation numbers for the River Walk, already one of the state's top attractions.

The Aztec is undergoing a \$4 million upgrade that will allow for a stage renovation, plush seats and a state-of-the-art sound system. It will all serve as the backdrop to celebrate the masters of country music.

The Aztec, which had re-opened in 2006 as a large-format theater, has been closed since mid-December 2007 after struggling to attract an audience. Marcos Barros, president and CEO of the San Antonio Area Tourism Council, says, "My gut feeling tells me there was just not enough mix of the movies."

Drury Hotels CEO Rick Drury, who feels live music at this venue will be the winning combination, told the *San Antonio Express-News*, "I want to put the focus on San Antonio as a country music town. I want to make it a musician-friendly environment and really bring new life and activity down to the River Walk. We're going to go over the top on this one."

For more information, call (800) ALAMO-07 or visit [www.visitsanantonio.com](http://www.visitsanantonio.com).

SUN-DRENCHED beaches, swaying palms and an abundance of history with a distinct Hispanic flavor can all be found in the **Texas Historical Commission's latest travel guide, the Texas Tropical Trail Region**, which they will **unveil March 7** in Laredo.

"The brochure is a road map and a history lesson all in one, transporting tourists back in time for a taste of what life in South Texas was once like," says Janie Headrick, state coordinator of the THC's nationally recognized Texas Heritage Trails Program. "It tells the story of this heritage region, its colorful cultures and the people who embraced this ecologically complex region."

This Texas Tropical Trail Region travel guide tours 20 counties: Aransas, Brooks, Cameron, Dimmit, Duval, Hi-

dalgo, Jim Hogg, Jim Wells, Kenedy, Kleberg, La Salle, Live Oak, McMullen, Nueces, Refugio, San Patricio, Starr, Webb, Willacy and Zapata.

Highlights along the way include the Wild Horse Desert, some of Texas' largest and most noteworthy ranches, dozens of nature preserves and tropical landscapes, as well as a unique bi-national culture. The trail continues to the Gulf coastline, charming border towns, historic lighthouses, numerous museums and heritage sites. Further south in the Rio Grande Valley you will find some of the best bird-watching territory in the country.

For a free Texas Tropical Trail Region brochure or other heritage trail guides, call (866) 276-6219 or visit [www.thc.state.tx.us](http://www.thc.state.tx.us).

AFTER SEVEN years of being named one of the top cities for making movies, **Austin** jumps to the **No. 1 spot** on *MovieMaker* magazine's "**Top Ten U.S. Cities to Live and Make Movies**" list. This is the eighth year of the rankings, where Austin has traditionally been in the top three spots for the past seven years.

"Austin is the prime example of a Texas city that has caught on to a deceptively simple tactic not always employed in many other cities or states or within the film industry in general: cooperation," says *MovieMaker*. The article praises Austin for helping to pass a statewide incentive program that provides producers with rebates for filming in the Lone Star state. Another highlight is the Austin Film Commission's new "Now Playing: Cast and Crew Bonus Features" discount program, which extends discounts at local businesses to industry professionals filming in Austin. *MovieMaker* also cites the region's diverse geography, broad industry infrastructure (including a sufficient crew base and ample studio space) and film-friendliness as other reasons the city remains a favorite.

SPRING BREAK

THERE ARE many recipes for **Spring Break fun in Texas**, but the most popular plans have one requisite: just add water. Whether it's an inland lake or river in the Hill Country or a stretch of beach along the Gulf Coast, Texas is the perfect setting for the March ritual.

South Padre Island, with its 34 miles

of beach along the Gulf Coast, regularly makes national Top 10 Spring Break lists for an entertainment schedule catered to its seasonal visitors, an abundance of water sports and its Schlitterbahn Beach Water Park.

Though South Padre is Spring Break Central, nearby Corpus Christi, Port Aransas and Aransas Pass draw their share of sun worshippers.

Further up the coast, Galveston holds its own with the crowds. There, miles and miles of beaches and entertainment are complemented by attractions like Moody Gardens, its own Schlitterbahn water park and The Strand Historic District.

The rivers and lakes of the Hill Country draw their own brand of Spring Breakers. San Marcos and New Braunfels attract a hardy crowd of those geared to tube down the San Marcos or Guadalupe rivers. Proximity to Austin's live music scene and San Antonio's attractions help its popularity.

In Austin, water sports abound on Lake Travis, one of 13 lakes in the Hill Country region.

With the state's diversity, just about any corner of Texas would be perfect for a little break. For information on what else there is to see and do in the state, visit [www.texashighways.com](http://www.texashighways.com) and [www.traveltex.com](http://www.traveltex.com).

For more information on Spring Break hot spots, visit [www.sopadre.com](http://www.sopadre.com), [www.galveston.com](http://www.galveston.com), [www.nbjumpin.com](http://www.nbjumpin.com), [www.toursanmarcos.com](http://www.toursanmarcos.com), [www.corpuschristi-tx-cvb.org](http://www.corpuschristi-tx-cvb.org), [www.portaransas.org](http://www.portaransas.org), [www.aransaspass.org](http://www.aransaspass.org) and [www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us).

## BUFFALO SOLDIERS

**M**ANY HELPED shape the Texas frontier, and a series of statewide educational events are aimed at entertaining and educating people about those contributions made and the challenges faced, especially by **Buffalo Soldiers**. They are the black soldiers who made up 20 percent of the U.S. Cavalry during the Indian Wars of the late 1800s, including soldiers of the U.S. Army's 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments.

The Texas Buffalo Soldiers — a statewide network of volunteers dedicated to youth education through historical re-enactments and exhibits — is undertaking spring and summer events to give a glimpse into the day-to-day lives of the soldiers. The



Volunteers offer a glimpse into the history of the Texas Buffalo Soldier during a presentation at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Expo.

network was founded in 1991 and is co-sponsored by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Historical Commission.

Event participants also will learn the ways in which Hispanic vaqueros, American Indians and frontier women shaped Texas history.

"The main focus is on the Buffalo Soldiers, but you can't get away from the Texas story itself," says Luis Padilla, program coordinator. "All different cultures played a role in developing what we have today in Texas. For example, a lot of what we know about horses and riding comes from the vaqueros. The first rodeos were held by vaqueros in Mexico."

Although the Texas Buffalo Soldiers' 2008 event schedule was launched during Black History Month, July has been designated "Texas Buffalo Soldiers Heritage Month" by the Texas Legislature, and many of the program's featured events take place in July. Events typically include military encampments, displays, storytellers, demonstrations, presentations and more.

For a schedule of events, visit [www.tpwd.state.tx.us/learning/community\\_outreach\\_programs/buffalo\\_soldiers](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/learning/community_outreach_programs/buffalo_soldiers).

## GARDEN SHOWCASE

**F**IFTY YEARS after a snow storm shut it down, **Orange's Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center** is ready to **reopen**,

and the Stark Foundation's 262-acre showcase of nine garden rooms, four sculpture rooms and more than 300 species of plants will be ready for visitors on March 11 — just in time for spring. "Lutcher Stark created Shangri La in the '30s after reading James Hilton's 'Lost Horizon,'" Michael Hoke, executive director of the botanical garden and nature center, told the *Orange Leader*, adding that the gardens closed in 1958 after the destructive snowstorm.

"The Stark Foundation decided in 2002 to redo the gardens. Two hurricanes and a fire later, we are just about ready to open our doors," Hoke says. One feature that survived the setbacks is the 1,231-year-old Pond Cypress found in Adams Bayou on the Shangri La grounds. Other draws of the resurrected gardens include a wall of fountains, reflecting pools, museum, theater, children's garden and a meditation pavilion. There also is a café, bookstore and electric boat rides to nature centers dotting the swamp. For more information, call (409) 670-9341 or visit [www.shangrilagardens.org](http://www.shangrilagardens.org).

**T**O CELEBRATE this year's poppy season, the **El Paso Museum of Archaeology** is sponsoring a **photo contest**, offering prizes for the best poppy image captured on the museum's grounds. The deadline for entry is April 2, and all entries will then be displayed in the museum through May 3.

For more information, call (915) 755-4332 or visit [www.elpasotexas.gov/arch\\_museum](http://www.elpasotexas.gov/arch_museum).

## IN THE PRESS

**F**IESTA ARTS Fair, which helps launch the 10-day **Fiesta San Antonio** in April, was named among the **Top 10 Fairs & Festivals** in *American Style* magazine's February issue. The **Southwest School of Art & Craft** fund-raising event "adds a little picante" to the magazine's list of favorites and joins the list in the No. 7 slot.

Fiesta San Antonio, which runs from April 18–27, features art exhibits, carnivals, parades, pageants, car shows, soccer tournament, mariachi Mass and more. For more information, visit [www.fiesta-sa.org](http://www.fiesta-sa.org).

## INDUSTRY INSIDERS

**DOUG HARMAN**, who retired from the **Fort Worth Convention and Visitors Bureau** in January 2007 after 17 years of service, is serving as interim director of the **Arlington Convention & Visitors Bureau**. Harman is filling a vacancy left by Linda DiMario. It is expected that a new director will be named by the end of the first quarter of this year.

Other industry insiders settling into their new roles are:

**FELICIA MADISON**, Director of Sales, **San Antonio Convention & Visitors Bureau**

**JOE BLEDSOE**, Director of Corporate and Government Accounts, **Arlington Convention & Visitors Bureau**

**KARINA CARDONA**, Community Relations Manager, **San Antonio Convention & Visitors Bureau**

**VERONICA CASTRO**, Director of Tourism Development, **El Paso Convention and Visitors Bureau**

**BROOK UNDERWOOD**, Director of Convention Development, **El Paso Convention and Visitor Bureau**

**PATTI YOUNG**, Tour and Travel Sales Manager, **Corpus Christi Convention and Visitors Bureau**

**JENNIFER KIMBLE**, Tourism & Convention Services Manager, **Frisco Convention and Visitors Bureau**

**DENISE STOKES**, Public Relations/Communications Manager, **Frisco Convention and Visitors Bureau**

**TEXAS TRIVIA**

Which city can lay claim to having Texas' first post office, naval base, electric lights, medical college, grocery store and bakery?

Galveston, which is now a major port of entry for the cruise industry, remains relevant as a major tourist destination today, while maintaining a stronghold on its history. The Strand historic district and assorted historic buildings, homes and churches across the city remain popular attractions for visitors. Museums and historical ships also tell the tale of days gone by. Still, visitors can enjoy miles and miles of beach and attractions such as Moody Gardens and Schlitterbahn water park. Those looking for more information can always peruse *The Galveston County Daily News*, which also holds its own distinction of being the oldest continuously run newspaper in Texas since 1842.

**TEXAS TRIVIA**

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**TEXAS TRAVEL INFORMATION CENTERS**

**VISITOR NUMBERS as of January 31, 2008**

TRAVEL CENTER	Month Visitors	Percent Variation*	Year-to-Date Visitors	Percent Variation*
AMARILLO	5,718	-8.59	5,718	-8.59
ANTHONY	11,312	+8.46	11,312	+8.46
CAPITOL	5,188	-15.17	5,188	-15.17
DENISON	28,179	-5.46	28,179	-5.46
GAINESVILLE	47,094	+63.15	47,094	+63.15
LANGTRY	4,061	-16.03	4,061	-16.03
LAREDO	11,753	-2.65	11,753	-2.65
ORANGE	42,009	-11.12	42,009	-11.12
TEXARKANA	16,950	-45.18	16,950	-45.18
VALLEY	28,360	-29.22	28,360	-29.22
WASKOM	30,331	-26.59	30,331	-26.59
WICHITA FALLS	12,556	+24.92	12,556	+24.92
<b>CENTER TOTALS</b>	<b>243,511</b>	<b>-9.79</b>	<b>243,511</b>	<b>-9.79</b>

\*Compared to last year

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