

T E X A S Travel Log

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE TEXAS TRAVEL INDUSTRY

KUDOS

Hats off to **Ann Dean**, 1995 recipient of the prestigious **Roadrunner Award**. The award was presented last month during special ceremonies at the Texas Travel Counselors Conference, held in West Texas, and recognizes Dean's outstanding service to TxDOT's Travel and Information Division, to the tourism industry, and to the state. The 25-year TxDOT veteran was one of the first women to manage an information center, and has been manager of the Texarkana TIC since 1979. In presenting the award, travel services director **Milton Meharg** said the Texarkana center has served as the official training ground for new managers and manager trainees for many years. "This is quite a testament to Ann's capabilities, as well as to the respect she has in the department," he said.

In further ceremonies at last month's TTCC, **Michael K. Benton**, executive director of the Irving C&VB, was honored with the 1995 **Gene Phillips Hospitality Award**. The award recognizes Benton's contributions to the travel industry in Texas and his leadership role in promoting travel and tourism. Benton is credited for helping transform Irving into an international center for business and commerce. As C&VB executive director for the past 18 years, he created the Irving Texas Film Commission and the Irving Friendship Foundation, which guides Irving's sister city relationships with Merton, England, and Marino, Italy. He currently serves on the executive committee of the Texas Travel Industry

Association and is membership development chairman for the International Association of Convention and Visitor Bureaus. Congratulations to all deserving winners!

LISTEN UP!!!

Attention all C&VBs, chambers of commerce, accommodations, and attractions! **The Texas Travel Information Center** in **Amarillo** is now undergoing major renovation. Due to construction, travel counselors are working out of a portable building with very little space. Therefore, please do not send bulk quantities of literature for distribution to travelers until further notice. Manager **Rosemary Eaves** said they should be back to normal in their almost-new building sometime this summer. For updates, call 806/335-1441.

COMING UP

As the **Hill Country Flyer** steam-excursion train moved into its fourth successful season this spring, the **Austin Steam**

Train Association announced plans for extension of service into downtown Austin. The Flyer now plys a scenic 33-mile route between Cedar Park and Burnet on Saturdays and Sundays. The extended service would allow for some short regularly scheduled trips on some weekday afternoons or evenings, and for weekday demand service, such as convention charters. The project includes renovation of 16.3 miles of former Southern Pacific track to passenger-carrying standards, and will allow operation of steam-excursion trains anywhere along the line from McNeil, between Austin and Round Rock, southward through north and east Austin into the downtown and Convention Center area. Projected completion date is the end of this year. To learn more, or to book your space on the **Hill Country Flyer**, call 512/477-8468.

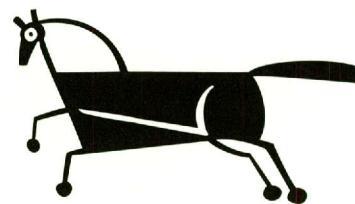
The **Arlington C&VB** and Visitor Information Center will build offices adjacent to The Ballpark in Arlington. The new facilities may be ready as early as this fall. Call 1-800-433-5374 for details. For future updates, watch this space.

PLACES

The Atlanta-based **Impac Hotel Group** announced completion of an extensive renovation project at the **Embassy Suites Corpus Christi** hotel. A new tropical decor using teals, mauves, and creams, and wallpaper with a pleasing, stucco-like texture brighten up the spacious suites. A Spanish-style atrium sits amidst lush tropical vegetation, where guests can enjoy the soothing waterfall sounds of a three-tiered fountain. The adjoining lobby boasts an exquisite dome ceiling crafted of glazed terracotta Mexican tile. More than 4,300 square feet of flexible meeting/banquet space can accommodate anywhere from 3 to 150 people. The hotel offers recreational facilities, complimentary breakfasts, evening receptions, shuttle service, and free parking. At 358 E. South Padre Island Drive. For information or reservations, call 1-800-EMBASSY.

Southwest Airlines has long been an important partner for tourism. Now, the **El Paso Mission Trail Association**

A SURE BET A new Bandera Weekend Getaway program has surpassed all expectations, say officials at Bandera Downs. For \$99, couples receive Friday and Saturday night lodging, a handicapping seminar for races run at Bandera Downs, the best seats available during Saturday and Sunday racing, and free entry to the legendary Bandera Cabaret. For reservations, call Bandera Lodge at 1-800-796-3514.



reports that pilots for Southwest will soon include special announcements about the area during their descent toward the city. You may hear something like, "You are now nearing El Paso, the home of the First Thanksgiving." As they move north toward Albuquerque, you might hear, "We are now flying over I-25, the route forged by Juan de Onate almost four hundred years ago when he led the first colonists into the Southwest."

THEME PARKS

Time Warner Corporation is selling 51 percent of its **Six Flags** theme park division for \$1 billion in debt and cash to an investment group led by **Boston Ventures**, reports *The Dallas Morning News*. The sale includes operating rights for Six Flags Over Texas in Arlington and Six Flags AstroWorld/WaterWorld in Houston. With a 49 percent stake, Time Warner will remain Six Flags' largest single shareholder, and will still help manage the attractions and feature trademark characters in rides, stores, and restaurants. Negotiations for Six Flags to buy Wet 'n Wild water park in Arlington continue (see the April issue of *Texas Travel Log*).

TEXAS TRAVEL LOG

is published monthly by the Texas Department of Transportation, Travel and Information Division. Please send news items of interest to the Texas travel industry to Texas Travel Log, P.O. Box 141009, Austin, Texas 78714-1009. (512) 483-3727, FAX (512) 483-3793. Deadline for each newsletter is the 20th of the month preceding the issue date.

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TRAVEL TALES OVERHEARD

1-800 PHONE TIC Counselor Brenda Moum had no idea the "glory" ahead, when she left Austin last month headed toward her first TTCC. She returned from West Texas as Queen of the Whiners, after being crowned at the early morning breakfast hosted by the Grapevine C&VB. "I had a great time at conference and learned so much," said Brenda. "I just wish I hadn't embarrassed myself on TV." Ahhhh. The price of royalty and fame.

WASKOM TIC A bus load of 50 people from Braunfels, Germany, stopped in for maps and travel brochures. They were headed toward New Braunfels in the Texas Hill Country to help the folks there celebrate their Sesquicentennial.

Betty and Chuck Wilson of Florida, and a team of 13, helped pave the way for the American Transcontinental Trail Ride by picking up information about the road ahead. They said the mod-

ern-day wranglers would soon follow for an overnight camp-out near town. The group, who started their trek from Savannah, Georgia, represented 16 states and Canada. They hope to arrive in San Diego, California, by June 1.

VALLEY TIC A disc jockey from KTEX radio in Harlingen arrived at the center's parking lot one recent early morning with a fistful of lottery tickets. For 20 minutes he handed out free chances to an eager crowd.

For those with a zeal for roller-coaster thrills, **Six Flags AstroWorld in Houston** will unveil Texas' first indoor roller coaster, May 13. **The Mayan Mindbender** takes riders on an adventure into an ancient temple where they become part of a lost civilization. State-of-the-art lighting and sound effects add to the mystery of the culture whose secrets remained hidden for so many years. The Mindbender brings the total of roller coaster rides at AstroWorld to 10, making it number one in the number of coasters in the state and Southwest, and number three in the world. For ticket information, call 713/799-8404.

A site north of **Clarendon** may soon become the site of a multimillion-dollar theme park, reports *The Dallas Morning News*. **Thunder Junction** will capitalize on the region's historic "thunder" of buffalo, cavalry, steam engines, and oil derricks, and will include water activities, rides by train and canoe, musical shows, and a hotel built from rail cars. The idea for the park was conceived in 1988 as a way to help senior citizens. **Pat Kaiser**, president of Yesterday's Children, based in Amarillo, estimates \$150,000 already has been spent, including state and federal grants, to get the project going.

Backing and ownership come from a private British investment group, and will, in part, benefit the non-profit senior citizen's organization. Investors hope to open the park's first phase within the next month or two.

FACES

Six Flags Over Texas president **Bob Bennett** announced restructuring of the theme park's public relations function, naming

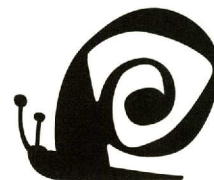
long-time PR manager **Bruce Neal** as director of communications. **Nancy St. Pierre** was promoted to the position of public relations manager. Neal, who will work directly with Bennett, takes responsibility for corporate media relations, and legislative, community, and tourism industry affairs. St. Pierre will concentrate on media relations, special events, and guest relations.

The **Vernon Chamber of Commerce** appointed **Lana**

NATURAL BORN THRILLERS

The River Legacy Foundation unveiled plans for a new nature center along the Trinity River in Arlington

to open in the spring of 1996. The River Legacy Nature Center will feature classrooms, a library, children's area, reception lobby, riparian viewing room, bird-watching room, retail bookstore, and gift shop. A "critter compound" will house animals and will enhance the existing Living Science program that already attracts thousands of visitors each year.



Tolleson director of tourism, a newly established position. Tolleson joined the chamber in September 1994 as executive assistant. Previously, she was director of the Uvalde C&VB, leaving in June 1992 when her husband was transferred to the Texas A&M Research Center in Vernon. With the appointment of Tolleson, Vernon will begin actively promoting their town on a statewide level. Give 'em a call at 817/552-2564 or 1-800-687-3137.

EARTH BOUND

Greyhound Lines Inc. and **Amtrak** could team up in an effort to compete with airlines for their share of the tourism dollar, according to *The Dallas Morning News*. **Thomas Downs**, Amtrak's chairman and president, and **Craig Lentzsch**, Greyhound's president and chief executive officer, have discussed consolidating terminals and booking tickets jointly. "There are tremendous incentives for us to work together to maximize customer convenience and avoid some duplicative costs," said Downs.

NATURE TOURISM

For a marvelous view of the spring bird migration, head to the **Connie Hagar Cottage Sanctuary in Rockport**. Trails designed specifically to protect the wildlife's habitat lead nature lovers to select spots where they most likely might see resident and Neotropical migrant birds. In December 1994, The Friends of Connie Hagar, Inc. purchased the property where renowned Texas bird-watcher Connie Hagar lived and learned from her feathered friends. The new attraction will be the site of the unveiling of the first sign designating the **Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail**. Noted

speaker, author, columnist, and expert birder **Roger Tory Peterson** will lead the ceremonies during Rockport's Hummer/Bird Celebration, September 7-10. At First and Church Streets; donations appreciated. For more info, call the Rockport-Fulton Area Chamber of Commerce, toll free; 1-800-826-6441.

WILDLIFE

Aerial surveys taken in South Texas in early March indicate the only hope of survival for **Attwater's prairie chicken** are captive breeding programs, say officials at **Fossil Rim Wildlife Center** in **Glen Rose**.

TEXAS TRIVIA

Which Texas resident started the first Rolling Stone magazine?

In 1894, renowned short story writer William Sydney Porter resigned his position as a teller at First National Bank in Austin to give all his time to editing a humorous weekly, the *Rolling Stone*. When the venture failed Porter moved to Houston, where he wrote for the *Daily Post*. In 1896, he fled to New Orleans and then to Honduras after he was summoned to Austin to stand trial for the alleged embezzlement of funds from the bank where he had worked. Upon returning to Austin in 1897 to visit his sick wife, Porter was arrested and sentenced to the federal penitentiary in Columbus, Ohio. It was during this four-year stint when he began using the pen name, O. Henry. And as far as we know, he never again returned to the Lone Star State.

TEXAS TRIVIA



CULTURAL AWARENESS More than 1,000 Native Americans will dance in full regalia during A Texas Natural Festival Weekend in San Marcos,

May 19-21. Native Americans will share their culture with tours of an Indian village, Indian arts, and demonstrations of crafts. In addition, the festival will celebrate the customs of many other Texas heritages, delivering the best of the Lone Star State in music, food, entertainment, and the arts.

For details, call 1-800-782-7653.

Down from a record low of 158 birds in 1994, only an estimated 68 birds are left in the wild in four remnant populations. Over the past two years the native Texas grouse has lost two-thirds of its population annually. Only two birds remain in the Austin County population and only 10 on the Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge near Eagle Lake. In addition to Fossil Rim, the **Houston Zoo** and **Texas A&M University** make up the captive breeding component of the recovery effort.

one of only two native Texans to sign the Texas Declaration of Independence in 1836 and helped draft the Constitution of the Republic of Texas. He also served as a member of the State Constitutional Convention and Texas Legislature. The nine-foot-tall bronze overlooks the Commerce Street entrance to Market Square.

MUSEUMS

In an unprecedented alliance between a museum, a university, and a major corporation, the **Fort Worth Museum of Science and History** opened **Hands On Science** on April 6. The first-of-its-kind lab is funded by **Lockheed Martin Corporation** and supported by grants awarded to **Texas Christian University's School of Education**. "Hands On Science will allow people to begin to comprehend that math and science can be fun," said museum president Donald R. Otto. *Hands On Science* is open weekday afternoons, evenings, and weekends. At 1501 Montgomery Street. Call 817/732-1631 for details.

HISTORY

The **City of San Antonio** accepted as a gift a statue of Mexican-American hero **Jose Antonio Navarro**. The celebrated defender of Tejano rights was honored at a statue dedication on May 6 commemorating the 200th year of his birth. The event coincided with the 20th anniversary of the opening of nearby Jose Antonio Navarro State Historic Site, which includes the home where the statesman lived from 1853 until his death in 1871. Navarro was

| TRAVEL CENTER | Month Visitors | Percent Variation* | Visitors Year-to-date | Percent Variation* |
|---------------------------|----------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Amarillo | 9,576 | -28.73 | 40,737 | -14.78 |
| Anthony | 15,336 | -33.08 | 68,349 | -19.32 |
| Denison | 22,347 | ** | 82,983 | ** |
| Gainesville | 30,960 | -22.71 | 129,702 | -15.98 |
| Langtry | 13,107 | +27.94 | 46,290 | +11.57 |
| Laredo | 9,837 | -20.28 | 40,956 | -17.11 |
| Orange | 47,469 | +3.39 | 179,613 | -1.69 |
| Texarkana | 52,902 | +23.99 | 203,790 | +24.75 |
| Valley | 20,034 | -3.13 | 165,510 | -0.98 |
| Waskom | 50,796 | +3.62 | 185,445 | +13.17 |
| Wichita Falls | 16,533 | -3.50 | 63,594 | +5.85 |
| Capitol Complex | 12,666 | +4.27 | 46,506 | -4.52 |
| 1-800 Phone Center | 16,065 | +57.31 | 78,015 | +39.87 |
| CENTER TOTALS | 317,628 | +6.54 | 1,331,490 | +9.11 |

Data as of April 30, 1995

*Compared to last year

** The Denison TIC was temporarily closed in 1990 due to highway construction; resumed operation September 13, 1994.

| MAIL SERVICES | This Mo. | Y-T-D |
|--|-----------------|--------------|
| | 132,848 | 366,456 |
| SERVICES TO THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY | | |
| TxDOT TRAX System | This Mo. | Y-T-D |
| Subscriber inquiries | 41 | |
| Addresses offered | 328,681 | |
| Addresses transmitted | 140,081 | |
| Addresses transmitted | | 286,840 |
| OFFICIAL STATE TRAVEL MAGAZINE | | |
| Texas Highways print run | | |
| This month | | 376,007 |
| This month last year | | 419,670 |
| This year-to-date | | 1,476,549 |
| Last year-to-date | | 1,689,441 |

Dial toll-free 1-800-452-9292 for travel assistance from TxDOT's Texas Travel Information Centers (8 a.m.-9 p.m. daily)

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