

TRAVEL LOG

INSIDE:

- ★ Fires ravage drought-ridden state, engulfing more than 1 million acres, hundreds of homes
- ★ Houston passed over in decision to find permanent home for retiring space shuttle orbiters
- ★ Four top travel industry awards presented at Arlington conference

COURTESY DISNEY CRUISE LINES



As part of the *Pirates In the Caribbean* deck party, Disney Cruise Line guests enjoy fireworks on the high seas—the only fireworks display aboard a cruise ship.

CRUISE MAGIC

GALVESTON is about to get a little Disney magic. The Disney Cruise Line announced that the Port of Galveston would be the new seasonal homeport for its **2,400-passenger Disney Magic cruise ship**. This move, which included a similar announcement for New York and Seattle, marks the first time Disney has set sail from new ports.

Disney *Magic*, which will offer 12 seven-night cruises sailing from the Port of Galveston to the western Caribbean—including Grand Cayman and Mexico's Costa Maya and Cozumel—will arrive at the island port on Sept. 22, 2012.

Disney Cruise Line President Karl Holz says, "Guests can now enjoy a magical, one-of-a-kind Disney cruise experience with the convenience of departures from their own backyard."

When Disney *Magic* arrives, Galveston Island will be home to four passenger ships, including the 2,758-passenger *Carnival Triumph* coming in October 2011, 3,690-passenger *Carnival Magic* and the 3,114-passenger Royal Caribbean's *Mariner of the Seas*, both arriving in November 2011.

Princess Cruises' 3,080-passenger *Crown Princess* will arrive at the Port of Galveston in December 2012, bringing the total to five.

Carnival's Ecstasy and *Conquest*, which now sail out of Galveston, will be moved to New Orleans, with the arrival of their *Carnival Magic* and *Triumph* as replacements.

"The economic impact will be tremendous," says Leah Boyd, public relations manager for the Galveston Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"Quality cruise lines attract tourists, who spend millions of dollars in our hotels, restaurants and shops. With

Disney and four other new ships scheduled to sail from Galveston by the end of next year, the island's near future is looking very bright."

HOWDESHELL RETIRES

AFTER 32 years of service to the Texas Department of Transportation, Doris Howdeshell retired as the Travel Information Division Director on April 30.

Long recognized for outstanding contributions and commitment to the travel and tourism industry, Howdeshell has been responsible for the department's "Don't Mess with Texas" litter prevention programs, state-produced travel literature (including *Texas Highways*, the state's official travel magazine), the 12 Texas Travel Information Centers and for audiovisual services that provide multimedia support throughout the state.



Howdeshell, who became director in June 1995, also was responsible for the state's Adopt-a-Highway volunteer program. Prior to her role as director, Howdeshell served as assistant to the Travel Services Section director, then the division's staff services officer and then deputy division director.

She has earned many accolades in her career including the Tall in Texas Award from the Texas Travel Industry Association and the Keep Texas Beautiful Bluebonnet Award from the program.

"This is one of the hardest decisions I've ever made because I have the best job in the world in the best agency in state government, but my Hill Country 'ranchette' is calling me," Howdeshell says. She adds, "I'm truly honored to have worked for this agency and its leadership over the years."

"I plan to stay active in litter prevention efforts and will more than likely work as a volunteer with Keep Utopia Beautiful, a Keep Texas Beautiful affiliate, as well as adopt a stretch of highway on the Farm-to-Market road near our place in the Hill Country."

TxDOT Executive Director Amadeo Saenz Jr. says, "Doris' outstanding leadership and vision have made her a living legend in the state's tourism industry, and her commitment to this agency is simply unparalleled."



The Southern Area Incident Management Team initiated a controlled burn to starve the spreading wildfires and keep it from the McDonald Observatory (at right) and the surrounding area should the wildfires return.

FIRE WALL

AT PRESS TIME, fires continued to blaze through drought-ridden Texas, consuming more than 1 million acres.

"We're actually seeing Texas burn from border to border. We've got it in west Texas, in east Texas, in north Texas, in south Texas—it's all over the state," Texas Forest Service spokeswoman April Saginor told CNN Radio.

Presidio and Jeff Davis Counties, including Fort Davis and the Davis Mountains State Park, took a big hit with fires destroying about 300,000 acres and 50 homes, according to the Texas Forest Service.

Fortunately, Indian Lodge, built by the Civilian Conservation Corps, and the Fort Davis National Historic Site, a frontier fort, were not damaged. Nor was the University of Texas' McDonald Observatory, which ended up offering refuge to park evacuees.

As a precautionary measure, Big Bend National Park Superintendent William E. Wellman ordered temporary closures of all high Chisos backpacking campsites, including the Blue Creek and Lower Juniper Zones, though day use was still permitted on the Chisos Mountain trails.

The Chihuahuan Desert Nature Center was threatened as fires raged through grasslands just north of the Center property, but the visitor center, outdoor exhibits, botanical gardens

and the greenhouse were unscathed.

According to Dr. Cathryn Hoyt, executive director of the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute, the fires did clear piles of cut juniper and burned back saplings helping to complete a much-needed disturbance regimen.

"We've been wanting to burn for years, although not quite so dramatically," Hoyt says.

Palo Pinto and Stephens counties also suffered a difficult blow with many homes and nearly 150,000 acres of the Possum Kingdom Complex destroyed. That complex includes Possum Kingdom Lake, Caddo, Strawn and Bunker—all of which have had evacuations. The 1,500-acre Possum Kingdom State Park suffered extensive damage and remained closed at press time "pending assessment of the damage."

"We expect this to go on for a while," Saginor says, "so we're in it for the long haul."

In response to ongoing wildfire activity, the state activated the Texas Intra-state Fire Mutual Aid System (TIFMAS), a network of Texas fire departments willing to provide emergency resources to neighboring communities during threat of disaster.

Fire prevention and response resources from local fire departments across Texas have been deployed to fight fires across the state including Callahan, Eastland, Garza, Kent, Midland, Moore, Palo Pinto, Pecos, Presidio, Stephens, Sterling and Tom Green counties.

Saginor says firefighters from 34 states also came to Texas to help battle the blazes.

Additionally, the Texas Forest Service had more than 750 personnel and 22 air assets deployed to multiple fires; The American Red Cross, Salvation Army and Southern Baptist Disaster Relief stepped in to offer resources, supplies and shelter to first responders and fire victims in the impacted areas; and the Texas Department of Transportation provided bulldozers and other necessary resources.

"Texas is thankful to the brave men and women across the state who are battling these fires on the front lines and providing support to wildfire victims," says Gov. Rick Perry, who requested a Major Disaster Declaration, from President Barack Obama, for the State of Texas as a result of widespread wildfires.

The Texas Forest Service has kept ongoing updates on the wildfire situation at <http://txforestservicetamu.edu/main/article.aspx?id=12888>.

TRAVEL NEWS

SEVEN NEW Texas Paddling Trails open May 10 in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, giving paddlers and nature tourists options to enjoy everything from a relaxing journey down a shaded creek or a wildlife-rich wetlands pond to a wide-open paddle across a placid lake

or the exciting Trinity River "white-water"—all within view of the Dallas skyline.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, in partnership with north Texas communities, is hosting seven events on May 10, beginning with an 8 a.m. kickoff of the Walnut Creek Paddling Trail on Joe Pool Lake in Grand Prairie. Other paddling-trail launch events will take place throughout the day in Arlington, Bridgeport, Dallas, Lewisville and Rowlett, culminating with a 5 p.m. final trail opening ceremony at Runaway Bay on Lake Bridgeport in Wise County.

"These trails represent what is simply the biggest water park in Texas, showcasing some of the state's most remarkable natural areas convenient to our growing urban population," says Carter Smith, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's executive director. "Their opening reinforces the crucial message that travel matters to all Texans and our communities that depend on tourism dollars."

With a grand total of 57 miles of paddling trails, including the 11-mile Lake Arlington Paddling Trail that launched in 2008, the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex will offer tourists yet another way to visit and enjoy the outdoors. By offering these new nature tourism opportunities in addition to the fine dining, shopping and historical and cultural tourism attractions, the DFW area has even more to offer tourists.

"The DFW-area paddling trails represent the largest concentration of official Texas Paddling Trails in the state," says Shelly Plante, TPWD's nature tourism manager.

For more information, visit <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fishboat/boat/paddlingtrails>.

NASA'S retiring space shuttle fleet will soon be on permanent display at institutions across the country, and speculation of where they would go ended with the official announcement on April 12. Despite public lobbying efforts to bring one of the shuttles "back home" to Houston—home of the Johnson Space Center, the astronaut corps and NASA's Mission Control Center for the 135 shuttle missions—the **Space City was not one of the chosen few.**

More than 20 institutions across the country vied for one of only four shuttle orbiters that represent 30 years of spaceflight and numerous science and technology firsts.

Retiring Shuttle *Atlantis* will make Kennedy Space Center its permanent home.

NASA Administrator Charles Bolden announced the following pairings for permanent display: *Atlantis*, Kennedy Space Center, Florida; *Discovery*, Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, near Washington, D.C.; *Endeavour*, California Science Center, Los Angeles; and *Enterprise*, Intrepid Sea, Air and Space Museum, New York.

"This was a very difficult decision, but one that was made with the American public in mind. In the end, these choices provide the greatest number of people with the best opportunity to share in the history and accomplishments of NASA's remarkable Space Shuttle Program," Bolden says. "These facilities we've chosen have a noteworthy legacy of preserving space artifacts and providing outstanding access to U.S. and international visitors."

In a joint commentary for CNN, Reps. Ted Poe, R-Texas, and Pete Olson, R-Texas, were demanding answers. "The first word spoken on the moon landing was 'Houston,' not New York City. It defies logic for a shuttle not to land in 'Space City, U.S.A.' NASA has been ingrained in the culture of Houston for generations. The men and women who work at Mission Control in Houston have guided every single shuttle mission since the program began. Astronauts have raised their families in Houston. The families of the astronauts who perished in the Challenger and Columbia missions still live in Houston," they wrote.

Other shuttle artifacts also were allotted to various institutions, including flight deck pilot and commander seats that will go to Houston's NASA's Johnson Space Center.

NASA expects to deliver the shuttles next year. The winning institutions will have to pay about \$28 million for their shuttle's 747 piggyback transport, with two exceptions. Congress exempted the Smithsonian, and Shuttle *Atlantis* will be towed a short distance down the road to Kennedy Space Center.



COURTESY OF NASA

FOOD, MASSAGE and music helped **Austin Bergstrom International Airport** make **Smartertravel.com's list of most stress-free airports.**

The article notes the airport's branches of quintessential Austin establishments like The Salt Lick (barbecue), Amy's Ice Cream, Ruta Maya coffee, BookPeople, Austin City Limits/Waterloo Records, and SoCo Market.

"There are so many things to see and do in Austin, it's hard to hit all the hot spots in just one visit; however, the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport makes it easy for travelers to get to several local favorites before heading home," the website says.

Additionally, chair massages help take the edge off traveling, and "if you didn't get your fill of live music downtown, you may be fortunate enough to catch a live show during the airport's *Music in the Air* concert series, held weekdays throughout the terminals," Smartertravel.com says.

Other cities with stress-free airports include Seattle; Palm Springs, Calif.; Minneapolis-St. Paul; Tucson; Orlando; Palm Beach, Fla.; Providence, R.I., and Bern, N. C.

WILDFLOWER DAZE

WITH drought dampening the showcase of spring wildflowers, experts are now planting the seeds of hope that summer blooms are still possible.

"Almost everyone I've talked to is reporting small patches of bluebonnets with plants that are smaller than normal," says Damon Waitt, senior botanist at The University of Texas at Austin's Lady Bird Johnson Wild-

flower Center. "Lack of fall rain, which affects germination, and lack of spring rain, which affects plant growth, is a double whammy for this year's bluebonnets."

Nearly one third of the state is in an extreme drought, reportedly the victim of the La Niña weather pattern's extended stay.

A little spring rain could fuel a decent show of summer wildflowers. Waitt notes that wildflowers that bloom in summer months are more drought-tolerant than their spring-blooming cousins. They include many in the sunflower family, such as purple coneflower, Indian blanket, Mexican hat and black-eyed Susan.

What has remained predictable is the Wildflower Center's floral display. "Our native plant gardens are exploding with color this spring," Waitt says, noting that Wildflower Center bluebonnets will be showy for several more weeks.

The center's bluebonnets can be viewed at <http://www.wildflower.org/bbcam>.

For sightings reported by the public, visit <http://Instar.com/wildflowers/index.html>, contact the Texas Department of Transportation at 1-800-452-9292, or view: http://www.txdot.gov/travel/flora_map_disclaimer.htm.

TOP TRAVEL AWARDS

FOUR TRAVEL INDUSTRY professionals received prestigious awards during ceremonies at the 56th annual **Texas Travel Counselors Conference** held in **Arlington**. The awards were given for providing outstanding customer service and for exceptional contributions to the state's travel and tourism industry, TxDOT and the state.

Kirsti Harms, a graphic designer for the Texas Department of Transportation's Travel Information Division, received the **Lone Star Award**. She is an 11-year veteran at TxDOT's Travel Information Division, where she has designed and produced award-winning materials including *Texas Highways* magazine, the *Texas Events* calendar, the *Texas Official Travel Map*, the *Texas State Travel Guide* and several other tourism publications.

"While most of her work is done behind the scenes, her contributions to the Texas travel industry have been, and continue to be, a vital component to the overall success of the state's tourism efforts," says Kathy Murphy,

the Travel Information Division's Travel Publications Section director.

Bandera County Convention and Visitors Bureau Director Patricia Moore received the **Gene Phillips Hospitality Award** for her contributions to Texas' \$51.8 billion travel industry.

Moore was instrumental in Bandera County's Convention and Visitors Bureau moving into the 1870 George Hay House, one of Bandera's most historic buildings.

She has been an active member of the Texas Tourism family and with the Bandera County Convention and Visitors Bureau for 15 years. She is a member of the Texas Association of Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Texas Travel Industry Association, Bandera County's Film Commission, the Great Western Cattle Trail Association and the Texas Hill Country Region Board of Directors.

Christine Anderson, a senior travel counselor at TxDOT's Texas Travel Information Center in Orange for more than 20 years, won the **TxDOT**

Roadrunner Award. She has been an ambassador and "the face of Texas," counseling travelers and tourists who stop by the Texas Travel Information Center in Orange.

Anderson is a certified professional travel counselor on state and national levels, has served on TxDOT's Travel Counselors Advisory Committee, and was named Travel Counselors Advisory Committee's Shinning Star.

"Christine often goes out of her way to get information for her customers and even has them coming back in asking specifically for her," says Brenda Harper, Travel Services Section Director of the Travel Information Division.

Jasjit Rathod of the AAA office in Katy received the **AAA Roadrunner Award**.

Rathod, a 12-year AAA employee, consistently "demonstrates her expertise in all areas of auto travel" and is "an enthusiastic employee who continuously provides members and staff with a positive attitude and welcoming demeanor," says her supervisor Linda Phillips.

TEXAS TRIVIA

What historical park will celebrates a 165-year milestone with a living history encampment on May 7?

The Palo Alto Battlefield National Historical Park marks its 165th anniversary of a key battle between the United States and Mexico by presenting a living-history encampment on the park grounds. The free event is open from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Visitors can interact with the park's growing corps of living historians and more than 30 other participants who come from Texas, Arkansas and Oklahoma. Guests also can observe the camp life of both U.S. and Mexican soldiers.

Portrayals include U.S. and Mexican infantry and artillery, teamsters, Texas Rangers, medical personnel, cooks and laundresses. Demonstrations include military drills, medical procedures, enlistment procedures, trials/punishments and a canon firing. For more information, visit www.nps.gov/paal/index.htm.

TEXAS TRIVIA

TEXAS TRAVELOG is published monthly by the Texas Department of Transportation, Travel Information Division. Please send news items of interest to the Texas travel industry to Texas Travelog, P.O. Box 141009, Austin, TX 78714-1009. (512) 486-5874, fax (512) 486-5879. E-mail: trv-log@dot.state.tx.us. Deadline for each newsletter is the 15th of the month preceding the issue date. To receive this publication electronically, please e-mail trv-log@dot.state.tx.us.

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DESIGN/LAYOUT: Kirsti Harms

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TEXAS TRAVEL INFORMATION CENTERS

VISITOR NUMBERS as of March 31, 2011

TRAVEL CENTER	Month Visitors	Percent Variation*	Year-to-Date Visitors	Percent Variation*
AMARILLO	7,056	-0.93	17,021	+0.56
ANTHONY	6,492	-32.42	17,265	-29.55
CAPITOL	8,143	-11.97	19,345	-4.14
DENISON	30,674	+8.53	73,494	+17.90
GAINESVILLE	21,499	-27.31	49,453	-28.29
LANGTRY	6,776	-24.29	13,801	-19.08
LAREDO	6,595	-41.38	19,119	-35.09
ORANGE	37,735	+12.95	100,147	+16.09
TEXARKANA	10,196	-63.07	21,259	-64.32
VALLEY	10,976	-36.85	62,052	-9.18
WASKOM	28,624	-23.13	64,880	-26.74
WICHITA FALLS	14,829	+17.28	33,909	+16.24
CENTER TOTALS	189,595	-18.38	491,745	-13.93

*Compared to last year

Dial toll-free (800) 452-9292 for travel assistance from
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(8 a.m.–6 p.m. daily, Central Time)

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