

TEXAS TRAVELLO

A \$3.4 million renovation project for the **Gainesville T.I.C.** is underway. Work has begun on a new truck parking area. Major renovations of the main building will follow, allowing for increased space, a video viewing room, a city display area, relocated restrooms in the main building and a semi-circle travel counselor counter. The current 24-hour restroom area will be converted into a festival arbor facility equipped with water and electricity.

Throughout renovations, which are expected to be completed by early 2004, travel counselors will continue to provide the same quality service from a portable building on site.

The Laredo T.I.C. welcomes two new travel counselors, Naomi Flores and Ofelia "Ofi" F. Noriega. Naomi, who has been a temporary contract employee since the center opened, officially joined the staff on Jan. 7. She brings with her years of administrative and customer service experience. Ofelia joined the Laredo staff on Jan. 20. She has served as office manager for the American Cancer Society and administrative secretary for the City of Laredo. She was also the adminis-

trative secretary to the Director of Maintenance for the Laredo District Office and a former summer employee of the Laredo T.I.C.

The new Spring 2003 Texas Events Calendar is now available. TxDOT's Travel Division produces this free publication and distributes it to the traveling public through its 12 Texas Travel Information Centers statewide. Travelers may also request a free copy through www.traveltex.com or by calling 1-800-8888-TEX.

EVENTS

More than 15,000 music, film and Internet fans and industry insiders will converge in the state Capital for **South by Southwest**, which runs **March 7-16**. Last year, about 75 percent of the music conference attendees and 45 percent of the film/interactive attendees came from out of state and 9,000 room nights were booked through the SXSW housing desk, according to SXSW publicist Elizabeth Derzco.

The Austin Convention & Visitors Bureau reports SXSW had a \$23.9 million economic impact in 2002. Projections are about the same for this year.

Media from across the globe—Australia, London, The Netherlands, Italy, France, Germany, Japan, Ireland, Brazil and elsewhere—are scheduled to cover events. For more information, call (512) 467-7979 or visit www.sxsw.com.

TRAVEL NEWS

An Amarillo Visitor Information Center, run by the Amarillo Convention & Visitor Council, **opens this month**. The newly named manager of the information center, Penni Bentley, said, "Amarillo is one of the last cities our size in Texas without a city visitor information center. This step forward is very important for Amarillo to remain competitive in the tourism market."

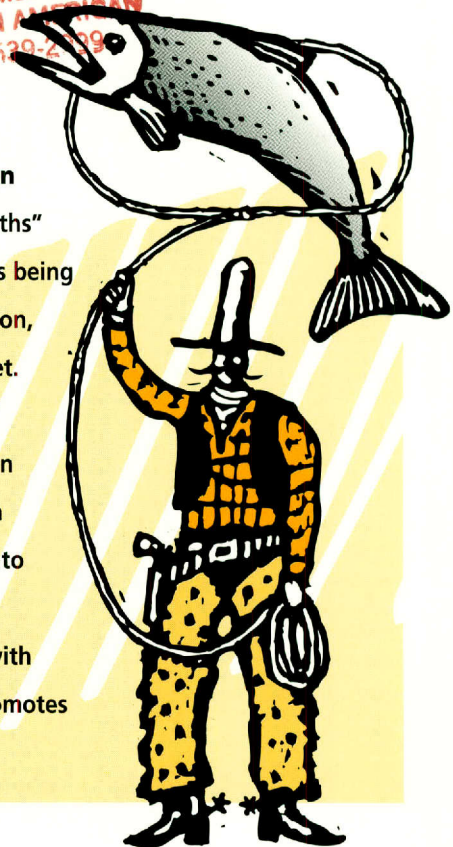
"With more than 1.5 million visitors annually, this new facility fills a major need for the city," Bentley added.

The city's Visitor Information Center is next to the Civic Center at 410 S. Buchanan. For more information, call 1-800-692-1338 or visit www.amarillo-cvb.org.

Dumas opened the doors to its new Visitors Center on Jan. 15 at 1901 S. Dumas

DEBUNKING WESTERN MYTHS At the beginning of February, Texas Economic Development launched a new national and international television advertising campaign touting Texas as a premier travel destination. This "Western Myths" campaign, which lightheartedly plays on perceptions of Texas, is being placed in consumer and trade magazines, national cable television, public service announcements, radio newspaper and the Internet.

Diane Sparks, Advertising Coordinator for TxED's Tourism Division, said, "The TV campaign features a cattle drive, a wagon train, a stagecoach, and cowboys on the beach. Each starts with the appropriate Old West set and ends with a blending scene into modern times." The print versions include golfers using horses rather than carts, fishermen lassoing fish, longhorns mixed in with a symphony and a horse in hiking shoes. The campaign also promotes www.TravelTex.com and 1-800-8888-TEX.



**TRAVEL TALES
OVERHEARD**

from TxDOT's Travel Information Centers

WASKOM T.I.C. Travel counselors at the Waskom T.I.C. were swamped with Louisiana State University fans en route to the SBC Cotton Bowl Classic in Dallas. The LSU Tigers were about to face the, later victorious, University of Texas Longhorns.

Waskom T.I.C. supervisor Melissa Heard-Wilson said, "During the 5-day period prior to the game, our center served 16,275 visitors. That was 69 percent of our December visitor services. The services recorded during this 5-day period were 93 percent higher than the same period in 2001." She added that because of all the LSU fans donning their school colors, "Our center looked like an ant bed of purple and yellow activity for days!"

TEXARKANA T.I.C. Local man, Bill Brown, dropped by the T.I.C. and invited counselor Lori Morton for a ride. Brown, an 83-year-old retired judge, and Lori headed down the road with the wind in their hair and the sun on their faces—all at a top speed of 35 mph. Of course, the speed wasn't the thrill; it was Mr. Brown's 1919 Ford Model T, restored to its original grandeur. Lori said it was the ride of her life.

TEXAS TRAVEL LOG

is published monthly by the Texas Department of Transportation, Travel Division. Please send news items of interest to the Texas travel industry to *Texas Travel Log*, 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.

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Design/Layout: Kirsti Harms

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Ave. Center representative Arlisa Cunningham said visitor traffic has been, "So far, so good," but she expects summer crowds will really have the place hopping, especially given its location along US 287. "Dumas is the turning point to go to New Mexico, Colorado or the Dallas/Fort Worth area," she said

"This has been a dream for two years—two years to get the dream financed and to get it going. It is now in existence."

The Chamber of Commerce, which manages the Visitor Center, has also relocated into the new building.

Panhandle-related tourism brochures may be sent to Sam Cartwright, President/CEO Dumas-Moore County Chamber, P.O. Box 735, Dumas, TX 79029. For more information, call (806) 935-2123 or e-mail samc@xit.net.

As part of its Homeland Cruise program—bringing ships to customers rather than asking customers to fly across

the country to get to the ship—**Norwegian Cruise Line returns to Texas in November**, according to Norwegian Cruise Lines. The seven-day cruise will call at Cozumel, Mexico; Roatan, Honduras; Belize City, Belize; and Cancun, Mexico. In 1997, Norwegian was the first cruise line to offer a Texas-based cruise and is the only major cruise line to sail from Houston rather than Galveston. Colin Veitch, CEO and president of Norwegian Cruise Lines said Houston is "much closer to the population center of Houston and the suburbs. It is also much closer to George Bush Intercontinental Airport in Houston for passengers flying in from other parts of the U.S. and Canada." For more information, call 1-800-327-7030 or visit www.ncl.com.

Big Bend National Park has increased private vehicle entrance fees to \$15 per week. Campground fees increase to \$10 per site, per night, and group campground fees will in-

crease to \$3 per person, per night. Eighty percent of the fees will go toward restroom renovations, amphitheater and Persimmon Gap Visitor Center rehabilitations, and boardwalk repairs. For more information, call (915) 477-2251 or visit www.nps.gov/bibe/index.htm.

The Midland Convention and Visitors Bureau has created tour cards for a **15-mile, self-guided driving tour** of President George W. Bush's former homes, schools and other points of interest.

"We've had numerous requests from visitors for this type of tour," Carolyn Coleman, Director of Visitor Services said. "People want to see where the President grew up, and this tour will enable them to do just that."

The two-sided cards, complete with a map, are available in the Visitor's Center at the Midland Chamber of Commerce.

For more information, call 1-800-624-6435 or (915) 683-3381 or go to www.visitmidlandtx.com.



BIG SALE, SMALL TOWN A sizeable chunk of Judge Roy Bean's town of Langtry is on the auction block, eBay style.

The auction, which ends on March 7, includes 228 acres of land owned by the Dodd family. However, the TxDOT-operated Travel Information Center is not part of the land up for auction. Richard Nored, who placed the auction online and owns about eight of the acres included in the auction, said the Dodds are living in New Braunfels now and only visit Langtry about once a year. "They just want someone to come in and do something

with it. If neither of us are in a position to do that, we'd like to at least pass the baton on to someone who can." He added, "If it weren't for the Judge Roy Bean Visitor Center here, this town would be gone. We need someone to invest in the Old West," Nored said.

Longtime Langtry resident, and Langtry T.I.C supervisor, Vernon "Neal" Billings said he cherishes the laid-back lifestyle that the town has afforded and will surely miss that if it goes away, but he also recognizes the economic benefits of change. "When Lajitas was sold for \$4.3 million, the Lajitas hotel property went from about 20 employees to 150. So, it has its pluses and minuses depending on how you look at it."

Nored said he has plans and drawings he'd like to share with the buyer, from an Old West Theme Park to a Spa/Resort overlooking the Rio Grande.

HOT OFF THE PRESSES

A new brochure, *The Chisholm Trail: Exploring the Folklore and Legacy* is available from the **Texas Historical Commission**. The brochure outlines the history of cattle ranching and highlights related attractions across the state. It's part of a series of Texas heritage tourism guides.

THC has also unveiled its newest travel guide, *Texas in the Civil War*. The guide notes historical sites like the Governor's Mansion in Austin where Sam Houston lived at the time of succession, Galveston's Civil War monument commemorating the Battle of Galveston and Juneteenth, and the Tr  u   der Union in Comfort, the oldest Civil War monument in the state. For a copy, call (512) 463-6255 or visit www.thc.state.tx.us.

TRAVEL FORECAST

The **Open Doors Organization**, in cooperation with the Travel Industry Association of America and the Society for Accessible Travel and Hospitality, released a **landmark study on the spending trends** and market scope of United States resident **travelers with disabilities**.

The study, which polled 1,037 people with disabilities, suggested these travelers could spend at least \$27 billion per year if certain needs were met. Those needs range from airport "meet and greets" and preferred airline seating to rooms close to amenities and accommodating staff members while lodging.

People with disabilities spent \$13.6 billion on 31.7 million trips in the past year. The study also suggested that people with disabilities could at least double their spending if their needs were addressed. Currently travelers with disabilities generate a total of 194,000 travel-related jobs, \$4.22 billion in payroll and \$2.52 billion in tax revenues in the U.S. For more information, visit Open Doors Organization at www.opendoorsnfp.org.

COMING SOON

Pat O'Brien's, a New Orleans icon, **makes its way to Texas**. A mid-April opening is scheduled for **San Antonio's Alamo Plaza** with the goal of it being ready for Fiesta.

George D. "Sonny" Oechsner III, owner, said, "Selecting San Antonio involved extensive research and is overwhelmingly the right city for the next Pat O'Brien's."

The bar/restaurant will resemble that of St. Peter's street, site of the original New Orleans location. "Although we want to keep the 'N'awlins' feel, we do want to fuse that with the distinct Texan charm," said Maggie Vicars, administrative manager for the restaurant. For more information, visit www.patobriens.com.



FEELING GREEN

Shamrock, the Texas town with its own piece of Blarney Stone from Ireland's Blarney Castle, gets set for its **annual St. Patrick's Day celebration** from **March 14-16**. The four-square-mile hamlet of 2,220 residents swells to more than 10,000 people who come for the parade, pageants, a dance, carnival, vendors, arts & crafts, lawnmower races, motorcycle rally, golf scramble, bull fighting and more.

For more information on the event, lodging or Shamrock,

call (806) 256-2501 or visit their Web site at

www.shamrocktx.net.

Residents of Dublin are geared for their 3-day

St. Patrick's Day festivities set for March 13-15.

They have scheduled a carnival, parade, motorcycle show, stew cook-off, children's activities, food, arts & crafts, a talent show and performers like the McTaggart Irish Dancers. For more information,

visit www.dublintx.com

NEW FACES

There have been some **recent changes and promotions** among our friends in the Texas travel industry. Welcome to your new positions:

- ◆ **Sam Balkum**, President, Lockhart Chamber of Commerce.
- ◆ **Brian J. Bondy**, Executive Director, Aransas Pass Chamber of Commerce
- ◆ **Sam Cartwright**, President/CEO, Dumas Chamber of Commerce
- ◆ **Wayne Chappell**, Vice President of Sales and Tourism, Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau.
- ◆ **Martha Hernandez**, Director of Sales, El Paso Convention and Visitors Bureau.
- ◆ **Mary Koenning**, Manager, Lake Buchanan Chamber of Commerce.
- ◆ **Sujo McKee**, Director of Sales and Marketing, Midland CVB.
- ◆ **Brandi Tannery Fischer**, Tourism Manager, Midland CVB.

TTC UPDATE

This year's **Texas Travel Counselors Conference**, which will be held **April 6-10 in Waco**, includes an extensive tour of the city's sites, attractions and neighboring communities. Along with the locations listed in the February *Travel Log*—West, Hillsboro, Lake Whitney State Park, Salado, Belton, Killeen and Temple—the **tour** will also **include** the Texas Main Street City of **Clifton**. A trip past the Bush Ranch in Crawford is also slated.

The annual conference is conducted by TxDOT's Travel Division.

FINAL NOTICE!

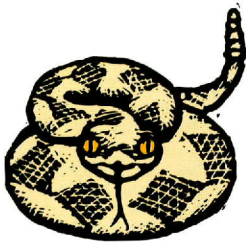
If you enjoy **Texas Travel Log** and would like to continue receiving it, please be sure to complete the form on the back cover and mail or fax it back, along with the mailing label. Thanks to those who have already returned theirs.

TEXAS TRIVIA

Which town is the "oldest town in Texas" and often referred to as the "cradle of Texas liberty"?

Nacogdoches was named for the Caddo family of Indians that lived there until 1716 when Spain established a mission there. In fact, the Caddoan word for "friend" was "tejas." Legend has it that the Indian town was founded when a Caddo chief on the Sabine River sent one of his twin sons three days to the west and the other three days to the east. The settlements they established were Nacogdoches and Natchitoches, Spanish and French spellings of the same Indian tribe. The road between the two settlements became known as El Camino Real. This town was a major eastern gateway to Texas for more than a hundred years. It was also the birthplace of the Texas Revolution when residents opened fire on a Mexican garrison in the middle of town. They forced Mexican troops out of Texas and helped pave the way for Texas' fight for independence.

TEXAS TRIVIA



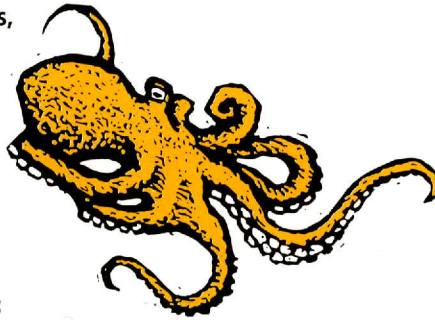
CREATURES ON PARADE Galveston's Moody

Gardens welcomes some new exhibits on March

8. The Aquarium Pyramid will feature the "Deadly and Dangerous" exhibit which runs indefinitely. Visitors will see marine life, land animals and plants that are danger-

ous to humans and other animals like snakes, scorpions, stingrays, electric eels, Blue Ring Octopus, Goliath bird-eating tarantulas and even honeybees. The Discovery Pyramid will feature a weather-themed exhibit that will run through September.

For more information, call 1-800-582-4673 or visit www.moodygardens.com.



NUMBERS as of January 31, 2003		
TRAVEL CENTER	Month Visitors	Visitors Year-to-Date
AMARILLO	6,249	6,249
ANTHONY	12,447	12,447
CAPITOL	5,943	5,943
DENISON	23,394	23,394
GAINESVILLE	26,484	26,484
LANGTRY	5,733	5,733
LAREDO	7,884	7,884
ORANGE	38,157	38,157
TEXARKANA	36,564	36,564
VALLEY	26,409	26,409
WASKOM	36,315	36,315
WICHITA FALLS	11,826	11,826
CENTER TOTALS	237,405	237,405

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)

www.traveltex.com • www.texashighways.com • www.dontmesswithtexas.org

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