

TRAVEL LOG

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- ★ Galveston Island Tree Conservancy wins \$50,000 for planting project
- ★ American Bus Associations names Top 100 best events for groups
- ★ New website established for sites along the El Paso Mission Trail
- ★ Daingerfield State Park reopens after a year of renovations, repairs



Fredericksburg businesses work to launch a Texas Center for Wine and Culinary Arts to celebrate Texas food, wine and agriculture while attracting the growing numbers of culinary visitors.

TRAVEL NEWS

THE TEXAS CENTER for Wine and Culinary Arts Inc. has officially received **nonprofit status** and an **organizing board of directors has been established**, according to a steering committee of 27 Fredericksburg business leaders.

According to its mission statement, the envisioned 30,000-square-foot center will be dedicated to the awareness, understanding and celebration of Texas food, wine and agriculture through educational programming and hands-on experiences. It will include a wine-tasting room, restaurant, patio grill, demonstration kitchen with tiered seating, hands-on kitchen, retail sales area, permanent classroom space and event space.

Activities at the center would potentially include enthusiast classes; wine tastings and food pairings; industry training for wine, food and hospitality professionals; culinary education; special events and rentals; casual dining; and shopping. Exhibits on Texas agriculture will be incorporated throughout the facility.

“The typical culinary visitor tends to stay longer, tends to spend more

money, be better educated and have an interest in touring museums,” says Ernie Loeffler, director of the Fredericksburg Convention and Visitor Bureau. “They are really somewhat of an ideal visitor for a town like Fredericksburg.”

A 2009 feasibility study by Fairweather Consulting showed the center could attract about 34,000 new visitors to Fredericksburg specifically for the center during the first year of operation. The annual economic impact of these visitors could reach \$11.2 million for Gillespie County, with a total annual estimated impact of \$16.1 million for Texas.

A business plan and development time line have been established, and a site selection committee has begun the search for potential locations in Fredericksburg.

A RECENT STUDY conducted by Texas A&M University’s Department of Recreation, Park & Tourism Sciences and Department of Agricultural Economics proved what members of the **Rio South Texas Economic Council** know—that **nature tourism is important** to the region.

Each year, this border region brings in more than \$300 million from nature-loving tourists who come from across the globe to view the almost 500 recorded bird species alongside the region’s nature preserves and ranch land.

In addition to the influx of cash that nature tourists bring, they also boost local employment. The study estimates more than 4,407 full- and part-time jobs are directly attributable to nature tourism.

Rio South Texas Economic Council Member and Mission Area Chamber of Commerce CEO Matt Ruszczak believes sustainable growth is an important balancing act. “It’s tempting to clear every piece of land for development when your economy is booming like ours, but the benefits that come from caring for nature corridors can also have an impressive and positive economic impact for our area.”

He adds, “Once you’ve watched a kiskadee chase off a peregrine



Bird watching (great kiskadee pictured) and nature tourism prove profitable.

falcon, it’s pretty easy to get hooked. This study makes it clear just how positive nature tourism is on a financial level; its effects are not only apparent today, but it also is set to bring great advantages for the region in future years.”

For more information, call (888) 778-3201 or visit www.RioSouthTexas.com.

AUSTIN Convention and Visitors Bureau commissioned **two studies** to help lay the groundwork for future destination marketing.

The surveys—Dean Runyan Associates’ “Economic Impacts of Travel, 2010: Austin, Texas” and Dr. Jason Draper’s “2010–2011 Austin Visitor Inquiry Study”—help show who is visiting and how the bureau can improve its marketing efforts.

Among the many findings, the reports show that 19.8 million people visited the Austin area in 2010, a 16 percent increase from 17 million visitors in 2009. In 2010, visitor spending totaled \$3.9 billion, and tourism provided 37,900 jobs, with employees earning \$927 million.

The city also benefited from an injection of \$85 million in local taxes and \$183 million in state taxes.

Austin CVB President and CEO Bob Lander says, “Dean Runyan Associates’ report indicated that travel is gaining ground again, so it’s crucial that we have a comprehensive understanding of the average visitor’s experience and needs as the destination grows.”

The “2010–2011 Austin Visitor Inquiry Study,” conducted by Draper, the principal investigator at the Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel & Restaurant Management at the University of Houston, shows that most of Austin’s leisure visitors stay for three nights. The majority are ages 40-59, followed closely by visitors 18-39 years of age.

With 90 percent saying they’re extremely likely to visit again, visitors agreed that Austin’s food, nightlife, performing arts, environmental awareness and “unique community” drove their positive reviews.

The study also revealed potential areas for improvement. Austin has room to grow with public transportation and as a family friendly destination.

COURTESY OF DICKENS ON THE STRAND



The festivities of Galveston Island's annual Dickens on the Strand event have been noted as one of the Top 100 Events in North America for group travel by the American Bus Association.

THE GALVESTON Island Tree Conservancy won first place in the 2011 Tom's of Maine 50 States for Good Community Sponsorship contest, snagging the \$50,000 prize that goes with it.

The winning organization was determined by online independent voters who chose the conservancy from a group of 20 nonprofit groups around the country. The organization was nominated in August as a semi-finalist by a panel of judges, and it was the only Texas organization to compete.

The Tree Conservancy works with the City of Galveston and other groups to restore the island's forest canopy. An estimated 40,000 trees were lost as a result of saltwater flooding from Hurricane Ike. Since then, the all-volunteer organization has spearheaded a variety of tree-planting initiatives and has helped plant more than 8,000 trees, including scores of large oaks on city streets and parks.

Using private donations, GITC's work plan calls for the planting of 25,000 trees by the end of 2014.

"The prize money we receive from Tom's will help fund this planting season's NeighborWoods program in the face of the worst drought in more than half a century," says GITC Tree Planting Coordinator Priscilla Files.

The NeighborWoods program provides free 15-gallon trees for planting in the city right-of-way by volunteer crews. Local homeowners select the species they want and agree to care for the trees.

"Planting trees is expensive," Files notes. "Trees are part of the city's basic infrastructure and are as important as roads and sewers. Trees shade our home, cut down on water runoff and are habitat for all the birds that count Galveston as home. We hope that everyone will support us moving forward, especially our local citizens and businesses."

BEST BETS

SEVERAL Texas events appeared on The American Bus Association's list of the Top 100 Events in North America for 2012, an annual collection of the top picks for group travel in the United States and Canada. Among the notable are big events in Denton, Galveston, San Antonio, Grapevine, Canyon and Dallas.

Now in its 30th year, "The Top 100 Events in North America" is published as a guide for travel professionals and the general public to use when planning group tours and vacations. Each spring, group-travel professionals select the winners from hundreds of nominees based on their broad appeal,

accessibility to large groups arriving by motorcoach, and other criteria.

Noted events were the Denton Art & Jazz Festival (April), Canyon's TEXAS outdoor musical (June–August), Dallas' State Fair of Texas (September–October), Galveston's Dickens on the Strand (Dec. 1–2, 2012), and Grapevine's GrapeFest (September) and Christmas Capital of Texas (Nov. 23, 2011–Jan. 6, 2012).

Although the ABA does not rank the events, it does give special recognition to "Annual Events," like Fiesta San Antonio, which receive separate recognition for having been consistently selected as a Top 100 Event in North America.

"Fiesta San Antonio celebrates the Alamo City's diverse history and culture with 100 events over 11 days," the ABA says. "Fiesta is the party with a purpose because every official event is produced by a local nonprofit or military organization. Those groups give back to their community all year long."

OLD MEETS NEW

FOR MORE than 400 years, explorers have trekked down the El Paso Mission Trail making historic discoveries and influencing Texas history along the way. With a newly launched website, visitors

can more easily explore the trail.

In an effort to promote tourism to the historic area, the El Paso Mission Trail created its official website—www.visitelpasomissiontrail.com—where potential visitors can access information about more than 50 tourism spots along the trail including historic sites, art galleries and shops, events and local cuisine.

El Paso Mission Trail, in El Paso, is the oldest highway in the nation and features some of the oldest communities in the state, including two of the oldest continuously operated missions in the United States, Ysleta Mission and Socorro Mission. The historic San Elizario Presidio Chapel also is along the trail.

To help visitors coordinate their travel plans, the site includes an events calendar and a plan section with event dates, lodging information, directions and helpful FAQs.

ONE OF Texas' oldest landmarks can now be enjoyed using some of the newest technology as Dinosaur Valley State Park unveils its new mobile application.

Dinosaur Valley State Park's free mobile app for iPhone and Android platform smartphones offers visitors enhanced interpretive on-site tours of the attraction noted for its well-preserved dinosaur footprints in the Paluxy riverbed inside the 1,500-acre park.

"One of the current problems we face at our park is that our interpretive displays are somewhat outdated, and our staff is just too limited to offer enough tours to meet all of the public demand," says Shannon Blalock, superintendent at Dinosaur Valley State Park. "Now, this app allows us to provide accurate information that can be continuously updated. And visitors will be able to experience real-time tours whenever they want at points of interest throughout the park. They'll be able to access video and audio clips, photos and written information right from their phones. We think it will make people's park experience that much better."

The phone app, found in the smartphone's app store under "Dinosaur Valley State Park" or "Glen Rose," includes listings for businesses, restaurants, lodging and other nearby attractions, as well as maps with turn-by-turn directions for area attractions.

All revenue generated from advertising within the app also directly

COURTESY TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT



Dinosaur Valley State Park, noted for well-preserved dinosaur prints in the Paluxy River, now offers a smartphone application.

benefits the L.D.L. Friends of Dinosaur Valley, which made the initial investment to buy the mobile app. The group helps fund projects within Dinosaur Valley State Park.

“Tourism is a huge industry in Glen Rose for such a small town, and the state park is a big part of that,” says Billy Huckaby, executive director of the Glen Rose CVB. “This is not only a good way to promote the state park but also all of the other wonderful attractions that we have here in Glen Rose.” He adds, “This new technology is where everything is headed. It’s just exciting to see Dinosaur Valley at the forefront. It kind of brings us from the dinosaurs all the way to the technology age, so to speak.”

For information, call (254) 897-4588, or visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/dinosaur_valley.

ZOO NEWS

THE HOUSTON Zoo is giving its seven **Asian elephants bigger stomping grounds** with the addition of 1.5 acres to the McNair Asian Elephant Habitat. The addition not only enhances the elephants’ living space, but it also will provide a world-class experience for zoo guests.

“The Houston Zoo has created an environment for our elephants that addresses both their physiological and psychological needs,” says Houston Zoo Director Rick Barongi. “The landscaping of trees, natural grasses and varied terrain creates a

wonderful environment for the elephants, and the open design and viewing areas provide an enhanced guest experience as well.”

The expansion area includes an 80,000-gallon capacity, terraced swimming pool and state-of-the-art water filtration system. It also has a shaded, 200-seat demonstration area.

The added space encourages the natural behaviors of the elephants—Thailand, Methai, Shanti, Baylor, Tess, Tucker and Tupelo—such as foraging, browsing, rolling, bathing and dust bathing.

BROWNSVILLE’s Gladys Porter Zoo will soon add a pair of endangered Orinoco crocodiles to its menagerie.

The crocs, Blade and Suede, were the subject of a great deal of publicity in Canada. Although they were already outgrowing their tanks, their situation became more dire after the death of the owner of Seaway Serpentarium in Ontario, Canada, left many animals behind.

The zoo offered to take the pair. The male is more than 13 feet long and weighs 1,200 to 1,400 pounds, while the female is 10 to 11 feet long and weighs about 600.

The Gladys Porter Zoo offered to take the crocodiles in early summer and began to create an appropriately warm habitat for the pair.

Import permits were issued in late September, and the exhibit renovations are nearing completion.

The process of transporting the crocodiles will be risky because when

they struggle during capture, their muscles build up high levels of acid that does not process out quickly. That is why large crocodiles frequently die during—or shortly after—capture procedures.

Orinoco crocodiles are native to Venezuela and Colombia. Extensive exploitation for their hides has placed them as the most endangered New World crocodylian, suffering a population decline of more than 80 percent within the last three generations.

PARK PERKS

AFTER BEING closed for nearly a year for repairs and renovations, **northeast Texas’ Daingerfield State Park has reopened** and is welcoming outdoor lovers to its 500 acres, miles of trails, lake shore, and Civilian Conservation Corp.-built cabins and pavilion.

Texas Parks and Wildlife invested more than \$5 million in capital improvements to add full hookup campgrounds with water, electricity and sewer connections; three new restroom complexes; renovations to the CCC-built Bass Lodge and dining hall; a new wastewater treatment plant; state park store and more. Money for the repairs and improvements was appropriated from budgets of previous bienniums.

“This park represents a lot to our community and region of Texas, and we are so glad to have it up and running again, serving the thousands of visitors who come here each year,” says Daingerfield State Park Superintendent John Thomas. “It really is a complete destination for outdoor recreation; it’s got beautiful scenery, a lake with good fishing, camping, cabins and group facilities. And the grand reopening event was a fitting tribute to a fantastic and historic park.”

For information, call (903) 645-2921, or visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/daingerfield.

THE DALLAS-BASED **Meadows Foundation has donated \$850,000** to help with the **recovery effort** in the aftermath of the September Bastrop County wildfire that burned much of Bastrop State Park.

“This gift, which will be divided among six governmental and non-profit agencies, is a wonderful example of private philanthropy taking the lead in helping Texas recover

from this catastrophe,” says Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Executive Director Carter Smith.

The gift will be shared among the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the Texas Forest Service, the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the SPCA of Texas and the Austin Humane Society.

“We are deeply grateful to the park rangers, fire fighters and forestry workers who risked their own safety to ensure the safety of others; to the citizens of Bastrop County who helped their neighbors get out of the fires’ path; and the Red Cross, Salvation Army, and the countless workers and volunteers who helped provide shelter and food to those who lost so much,” says Meadows Foundation President and CEO Linda Perryman Evans. “They are the real heroes, and it is a privilege to support them in their efforts.”

A large part of the money will go to the Texas Forest Service as pass-through funding to volunteer fire departments, not only in the Bastrop area but also across the state.

The majority of the campgrounds and picnic areas in the park are expected to be re-opened to the public by Dec. 1. The cabins and refectory, which were already scheduled to be re-roofed this fall, will remain closed through February 2012.

FREE EXHIBIT SPACE

APPPLICATIONS for free exhibit space at **TxDOT’s Texas Travel Information Centers**

will be **accepted** from 8 a.m. Dec. 1 to 5 p.m. Dec. 10. All city convention and visitors bureaus, chambers of commerce, and rural and regional tourism organizations that promote travel to a specific region in Texas (with a minimum of three cities representing that region) can apply for the free space on a six-month, rotating basis.

Applications are for the upcoming rotation—March 1, 2011 through Aug. 31, 2012. Exhibit space will be awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. Applications submitted before or after that time period will not be eligible for consideration.

For more information and to access the online application, visit www.txdot.gov and enter the keyword “display case.” For questions, contact Elizabeth Small at elizabeth_small@txdot.gov.

TEXAS TRIVIA

Which event celebrates the history of Texas' oldest town and the few extra flags that have flown over it?

The Nine Flags Festival in Nacogdoches (Nov. 17-Dec. 10) spotlights the community's history, which includes three more flags than Texas' six. The nine flags, including an extra three from attempts to establish a Republic of Texas, are the French, Spanish, Magee-Gutierrez, Dr. James Long, Mexican, Fredonia Rebellion, Lone Star, Confederate Stars and Bars, and United States of America.

The festival includes a large lighted Christmas parade, fireworks, a snow hill, holiday tour of homes, Christmas cooking show, two Christmas movies in the park, Santa's workshop, breakfast with Santa, "Holiday in the Pines" shopping extravaganza, a 5K Jingle Bell Run, and bike ride.

For information, visit <http://nineflags.vistainacogdoches.org>.

TEXAS TRIVIA

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TEXAS TRAVEL INFORMATION CENTERS

VISITOR NUMBERS as of September 30, 2011

TRAVEL CENTER	Month Visitors	Percent Variation*	Year-to-Date Visitors	Percent Variation*
AMARILLO	7,518	-8.28	71,198	-3.58
ANTHONY	5,434	+17.90	48,594	-23.89
CAPITOL	4,958	-20.76	58,278	-12.54
DENISON	18,184	-34.31	233,987	-3.25
GAINESVILLE	16,519	-13.52	184,667	-18.58
LANGTRY	2,983	-5.60	35,350	-17.97
LAREDO	4,797	-19.53	56,202	-27.04
ORANGE	22,894	-24.48	315,867	+2.66
TEXARKANA	26,092	+221.17	108,995	-47.33
VALLEY	5,633	-23.64	106,146	-11.21
WASKOM	21,502	-10.82	246,402	-13.50
WICHITA FALLS	10,189	-21.91	122,430	+3.58
CENTER TOTALS	146,703	-7.13	1,588,116	-13.23

*Compared to last year

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

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