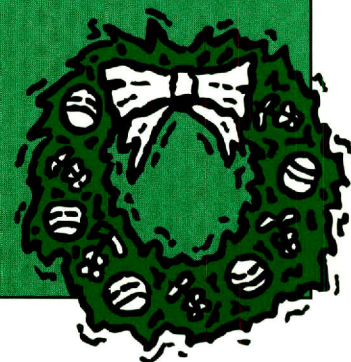


'TIS THE SEASON The holiday season is upon us and tree-lighting ceremonies, parades and festivities joyously consume our time (when we're not shopping). A few highlights across the state include:

- ♦ **Texas Hill Country Regional Christmas Lighting Trail**, through New Year's: Showcases the holiday lighting spirit of Blanco, Boerne, Bulverde, Burnet, Dripping Springs, Fredericksburg, Goldthwaite, Johnson City, Llano, Marble Falls, New Braunfels, Round Mountain and Wimberley.
- ♦ **Wonderland of Lights**, through Dec. 30: The City of Marshall puts on an elaborate display of more than 10 million lights, home tours, carriage rides, ice skating a Christmas parade and more.
- ♦ **Fiesta de las Luminarias** (Dec. 5-7, 12-14, 19-21) in San Antonio: Luminarias line the River Walk to "light the way" for the Holy Family.

For more information on these and other holiday happenings, visit www.texashighways.com or www.traveltex.com.



TXDOT

We are pleased to welcome **Martha Martin** to the Travel Division as the **new Travel Services Section Special Projects Coordinator**. Martin, who has worked with TXDOT for 14 years, most recently in human resources, began working in her new position on Oct. 15.

"With her meeting planning skills and human resources experience, she will be a great asset to the section," says Travel Services Section Director Brenda Harper.

Her experience will come in handy as she takes the reins as organizer for the Texas Travel Counselors Conferences, as well as being tasked with the regional display, and Achieving Service Excellence programs. She also will assist with the state's 12 Travel Information Centers.

Martin can be reached at (512) 486-5800 or by e-mail at mmarti4@dot.state.tx.us.

Applications for free exhibit space at TXDOT's Travel Information Centers will be accepted from 8 a.m. on Dec. 1 to 5 p.m. on Dec. 20. Tourism organizations can apply for the free space on a six-month, rotating basis.

Applications are for the next rotation — March 1, 2004, through

Aug. 31, 2004. Applications postmarked or faxed before or after the acceptance period will not be eligible for consideration. Exhibit space will be awarded by Jan. 15 to qualified applicants on a first come, first served basis.

All city convention and visitors bureaus, chambers of commerce, and rural and regional tourism organizations that promote travel to a specific region or metropolitan area can participate.

For more information, contact Norma Schwartz or Martha Martin at (512) 486-5800 or via e-mail at nschwar@dot.state.tx.us or mmarti4@dot.state.tx.us. Visit www.dot.state.tx.us/trv/trvse-v.htm?cg=disp to access the application online.

TRAVEL NEWS

Texas Travel Industry Association is gearing up to "Celebrate Texas Tourism" with its next **Unity Dinner**, slated for **Feb. 25, 2004**, at the Hilton Austin.

Unity Dinner, which celebrates tourism's affect on the economy, is a networking opportunity for industry players and legislative representatives. There also will be educational and professional development sessions. Gov. Rick Perry is among the guests scheduled to attend.

TTIA President and CEO Paul Serff says, "Unity Dinner has evolved into one of the largest gatherings of legislators, city officials and industry leaders to celebrate an important part of the Texas economy — travel and tourism. It has grown significantly in the past years, and each year the excitement and energy intensify."

Registration materials are scheduled to arrive this month and tables are assigned on a first come, first served basis, so quick responses are encouraged. TTIA representatives also encourage attendees to invite a state legislator or local official to sit at their table.

For more information, call (512) 476-4472 or visit www.ttia.org.

Initial movie trailers made it easy for people to remember **The Alamo**, the long-awaited **epic film** made in and around Austin, but its **release** is now being **postponed**. Moviemakers feel it won't be ready to hit theaters by Christmas Day, after all.

The \$80 million movie, starring Billy Bob Thornton as Davy Crockett and Dennis Quaid as Sam Houston, is now set for an April 2004 opening, knocking it out of contention for the 2003 Academy Awards.

"Ultimately, the end product is more important than the need to

TEXAS TRAVEL

meet arbitrary deadlines for awards," Disney studio Chairman Dick Cook says.

The Alamo director John Lee Hancock says, "Postproduction on an epic ensemble piece takes time and no deadline, no prestige release date, no awards season is worth more to me than the movie being fantastic."

The **Amarillo** Convention and Visitor Council's **Visitor Information Center** — 401 S. Buchanan — has shifted to **its winter operating schedule**.

Until March 1, 2004, hours are from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday; and noon to 4 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday.

For more information, call (806) 374-VISIT or visit www.amarillo-cvb.org.

Construction at the **Frank Buck Zoo** in **Gainesville**, which began Nov. 1, means the zoo will be **closed to the public through April 2, 2004**. But when the project is complete, the facility, which sees more than 100,000 visitors a year, will be enhanced with a new entrance, concession stand/gift shop and a new giraffe exhibit.

For more information, call (940) 668-4533 or visit www.gainesville.tx.us/zoo.html.

ON THE MOVE

Austin Convention and Visitors Bureau will move its **Visitor Center** in January to the **historic Grove Drug Building** at 209 E. Sixth St. The building, built in 1871, was a

TEXAS TRAVEL LOG

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drug store for decades and once employed William Sidney Porter, later known as short story writer O. Henry. This news comes on the heels of a recently released report that the center received nearly 40,000 tourists from June to August. That is 28 percent more than the previous year. During Labor Day weekend, more than 1,500 visitors stopped by to take part in a city tour, build itineraries and/or buy Austin merchandise.

"With the expanded convention center and several new hotel properties that have opened, we see an increase in downtown visitor traffic. We want to provide them with the best possible experience on our most famous street," says Austin CVB President and CEO Robert Lander.

For more information, call (800) 926-2282 or visit www.austintexas.org.

Regional headquarters for **AAA Texas** is moving out of Houston and into **Irving** and is expected to initially employ 500. AAA Texas has signed a 12-year lease for 80,000 square feet of space on floors five, six and seven of the NEC building at State Highway 161 and Highway 114.

"We have 20 district offices throughout Texas to serve members, seven of them in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. We are particularly pleased to be the newest resi-

dent of the City of Irving and appreciate the warm welcome extended to us," says AAA Texas President Thomas V. McKernan.

And additional 500 jobs will reportedly be added in the next few years.

The regional office will not include a district office for member services, so it will not affect operations at its district offices in Dallas (2), Arlington, Bedford, Fort Worth, Garland and Plano.

For more information, visit www.aaa-texas.com.

FACES

Maura Gast was named **executive director** of the **Irving Convention and Visitors Bureau** on Oct. 29.

Gast, who has been with the ICVB for 12 years, most recently serving as the ICVB's interim executive director since June, is a Fellow Certified Destination Management Executive and currently serves on the board of directors of the International Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus.

ICVB Chairman Donald Oberlin says, "She is a leader with extraordinary ability. I have witnessed her hands-on leadership talent within our bureau and within the Dallas-Fort Worth hospitality industry as a whole. These same skills have propelled her into a

position of prominence on a national level as well."

Also, **Erin Kerley** joined the Texas Travel Industry Association as its director of Community and Public Relations.

MUSEUMS

The ground is broken and the **Lyndon Baines Johnson Museum of San Marcos** is on its way to **becoming reality**. Luci Baines Johnson, daughter of the late president, was on hand for the Oct. 9 groundbreaking ceremony of the museum that will house memorabilia of the president's days at the then Southwest Texas Teachers College. It is targeted for an April 2004 opening.

The other museums across the state are devoted to either Johnson's boyhood years (LBJ State Historic Park in Stonewall), the presidential years (LBJ Presidential Library and Museum in Austin), or his adult home life (LBJ Ranch in Johnson City). This museum aims to fill the gap of the underrepresented era of when he was a student and an elementary school teacher.

For more information, visit www.sanmarcoscharms.com.

The **Dallas Arboretum's \$20 million Trammel Crow Visitor Education Pavilion** opened to the public in early

BRIDGING THE GAP Construction of a new causeway bridge — attaching Galveston to the mainland — is under way.

Texas Department of Transportation spokesperson Janelle Gbur says this \$135 million project is happening because "the old bridges are structurally deficient. One went up in the late '30s, the other in the '60s. They're just beyond their design life." The new bridge will be one complete structure featuring (in each direction) three continuous lanes of traffic, one auxiliary traffic lane for local traffic and one full emergency shoulder.

"It's more than just a new bridge, it's a beautification project," Gbur says. "We'll have extra landscaping. There will be towers on each end to signify that it is a gateway, and it will feature some architectural treatments."

Construction is not expected to disrupt travel. Traffic will be redirected to the new bridge once it is complete and the old bridges will then be demolished.



October. The complex — including a theater, information booth, porches and plazas, exhibit hall and dining terrace — will serve as an educational center for the Arboretum's horticulture, gardening and environmental science.

For more information, call (214) 515-6500 or visit www.dallasarboretum.org.

YEAR IN REVIEW

Here is a brief overview on tourism events of the year:

♦ **TxDOT:** Amarillo Travel Information Center gets a new facility ... A \$3.4 million renovation project begins for the Gainesville T.I.C. ... Safety Rest Area Program continues to yield impressively attractive rest stops for travelers.

♦ **What's New:** Nasher Sculpture Center and the Latino Cultural Center in Dallas ... Oscar Monnig Meteorite Gallery in Fort Worth ... Museum of Southern History in Sugar Land ... Hawaiian Falls Adventure Park water park in Garland ... Amarillo Visitor Information Center ... "Texas Legacies" musical opens as the updated version of "Texas: The Musical" at Palo Duro Canyon State Park ... State's Memorial to 9-11 unveiled at Texas State Cemetery in Austin ... Gilley's returns to Texas (Dallas) ... NASA-Clear Lake Convention & Visitors Bureau's new name is the Bay Area Houston CVB.

♦ **Off Beaten Path:** Southwest Airlines becomes the subject of Arts & Entertainment network's reality TV series ... Production begins and ends on \$80-plus million feature film, *The Alamo* ... Langtry, Texas is put on the eBay auction block but found no takers.

♦ **Honors:** Corpus Christi named All-American City ... Galveston named one of America's Dozen Distinctive Places.

♦ **Sports:** San Antonio's new WNBA team, the Silver Stars ... New Toyota Center to house Houston's NBA Rockets, WNBA Comets and NHL Aeros ... Austin joins Arena Football

WHEN IN ROMA... Roma's new inclusion in the World Birding Center system and other improvements has this small town poised as a big draw for tourists.

The deck at Roma Bluffs, behind the 1908 Customs House just west of the historic town plaza, officially became part of the World Birding Center system on Nov. 14. There, interpretive panels will shed light on the area's birdlife, history and river transportation.

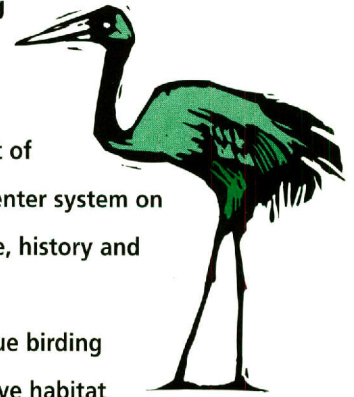
The WBC system — nine communities that create a system of unique birding sites from South Padre Island to Starr County — aims to preserve native habitat and enhance the Lower Rio Grande Valley as a nature tourism destination.

"This is a real jewel of the World Birding Center system," says Smokey Cranfill, Outdoor Recreation Planner with the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge, who will manage the site. "We have great birds out here, and people can see the history and culture all together in one place."

Additional plans are also in place for Roma Plaza renovations including a city visitors' complex, exhibit rooms, meeting spaces, bookstore and resource center near an outdoor amphitheater.

The city is planning more tourism facilities, as well as a new café, elsewhere in the same block.

For more information, call (956) 849-4930 or visit www.worldbirdingcenter.org.



League with its Wranglers.

♦ **Conferences:** Texas Traveler Counselor's Conference is held in Waco ... San Antonio is host city for Texas Travel Industry Association's Travel Summit ... Bryan-College Station hosts this year's Texas Association of Convention and Visitors Bureaus annual conference ... Despite rare winter storms, Unity Dinner perseveres in Austin.

PASSAGES

Texas' travel industry has sadly lost one of the state's top tourism advocates,

Barbara Sheppard of Port Aransas, who died on Nov. 1 at age 72.

Sheppard served on the boards of the Corpus Christi Tourist Bureau, Corpus Christi Area Convention and Visitors Bureau, Texas Travel Industry Association (TTIA), TTIA Nature Tourism Council, the Port Aransas Chamber of Commerce-Tourist Bureau, and the Texas Coastal Bend Regional Tourism Council. She also was an active member of the Port Aransas Action Force.

Barbara was the recipient of several industry honors including the "Barbara Sheppard Award," created in her honor to recognize individuals who made outstanding contributions in promoting tourism in the Coastal Bend. She also received the Tourism Pardner Extraordinaire Award and the Port Aransas Citizen of the Year.

TTIA President and CEO Paul Serff says, "Barbara was one of those wonderful individuals who lived life out loud." He adds, "I will never be able to think about Texas nature tourism without remembering her immense contributions over the years."

Marion Szurek, director of San Angelo Convention and Visitors Bureau says, "Barbara was one of the key people who put the Coastal Bend area on the map. Most of all, she was a joy, a shining star and was much loved. She will be missed, but her spirit lives."

Port Aransas Mayor Glenn Martin told the *Corpus Christi Caller-Times*, "The entire town and community will miss her and, in terms of tourism, the whole state."

TEXAS TRIVIA

Which general store has been in operation since 1847 and now doubles as a museum?

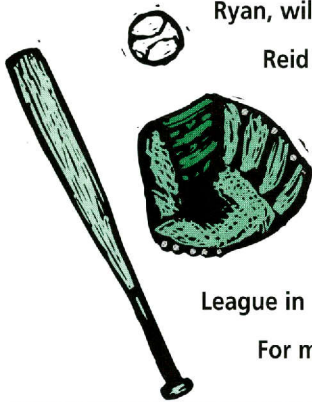
— Farm Road 134 in Jonesville —
Store in Texas' T.C. Lindsey & Co.
Known as "The Best Country
Store in Texas" —
for more than a century, but it still
maintains its look and feel of the
bygone days. Like taking a step back
in time, you can still buy sarsaparilla
and other old-fashioned fountain
drinks, bonnets, oak kegs, hoop
chase on a wheel, overalls, mayhaw
or blackberry jelly and more. Step a
little further back into the store's
museum corner to see antiques, an
old dentist chair, antique tele-
phones, butter churns, cotton gin, a
boil weevil duster, irons, sewing
machines and more from an
earlier era.

The store has also been featured
in many television programs and
movies, including "The Long Hot
Summer" (1985) and two Walt
Disney Studios films — "Bayou
Boy" (1970) and "The Pond" (1974).

TEXAS TRIVIA

MINOR LEAGUE SHUFFLE Round Rock and Corpus Christi will be sporting new minor league baseball teams in 2005. Owners of the Round Rock Express recently purchased Canada's Triple-A Edmonton Trappers, a move that will take the Central Texas team one step closer to major league status. The Trappers franchise, to assume the existing Round Rock Express name, will move to Texas in 2005. The current Double-A team, owned by Houston Astros' former pitcher Nolan

Ryan, will move to Corpus Christi that same year.



Reid Ryan, CEO and president of the Round Rock Express, says Edmonton has been "run by great people and they've done well in the past. But the hard part is that almost all of the teams have moved out of Canada. They were the last one in the Pacific Coast League in Canada," Ryan says.

For more information, visit www.roundrockexpress.com.

NUMBERS as of October 31, 2003		
TRAVEL CENTER	Visitors Month	Visitors Year-to-Date
AMARILLO	11,026	108,420
ANTHONY	13,475	125,331
CAPITOL	7,005	80,133
DENISON	35,270	334,506
GAINESVILLE	24,386	257,598
LANGTRY	5,400	60,533
LAREDO	7,759	94,504
ORANGE	49,763	505,253
TEXARKANA	39,654	443,604
VALLEY	11,017	166,820
WASKOM	48,073	485,283
WICHITA FALLS	14,432	159,948
CENTER TOTALS	267,260	2,821,933

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)
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