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.

TXDOT

We're pleased to announce the arrival of Lois M. Rodriguez, the new editor of Texas Travel Log. Lois comes to TxDOT's Travel Division with more than 15 years in the newspaper industry as a writer and editor for papers throughout Texas. Lois joined the staff on Dec. 2, and you can contact her with your Travel Log story ideas by calling (512) 486-5874 or via e-mail at TRY-LOG@dot.state.tx.us. You may also mail your press releases to P.O. Box 141009, Austin, TX 78714-1009.

AWARDS

When AAA recently handed out its coveted Five Diamond Awards for 2003, four hotels and two restaurants from Texas made this year's prestigious list.

Winners of the Five Diamond Awards are selected by AAA's inspectors, who arrive unannounced at hotels and restaurants all across the country to rate service, amenities, ambience and more.

HOTELS

+ Four Seasons Hotel Houston, Houston
+ Omni Houston Hotel, Houston
+ The St. Regis Hotel, Houston
+ The Mansion on Turtle Creek, Dallas

REESTAURANTS

+ The French Room (in the Adolphus), Dallas
+ The Mansion on Turtle Creek Restaurant, Dallas

There are 130 Five Diamond winners – 77 hotels and 53 restaurants. Complete results will be published in AAA guidebooks.

For the complete listings, visit www.ouraaa.com/news/news/diamond/03lodging.html.

MORE OF THE BEST

Travel + Leisure magazine surveyed its readers to help them select the World's Best. Several Texas hotels and restaurants were among those given the prestigious nod as Travel + Leisure continues to roll out its "best" listings.

WORLD'S TOP 100 HOTELS

+ Mansions on Turtle Creek, Dallas (63)
+ Havana Riverwalk Inn, San Antonio (94)

WORLD'S BEST BUSINESS HOTELS

+ Four Seasons Hotel, Austin
+ Four Seasons Resort, Dallas
+ The Houstonian, Houston
+ Fairmount Hotel, San Antonio

These ranked among those offering superior service to the business traveler.

BEST HOTEL RESTAURANT

+ Mansions on Turtle Creek, Dallas

Mansions on Turtle Creek beat out contenders like Bellagio in Las Vegas and The Peninsula in Beverly Hills.

We previously reported that Mansions at Turtle Creek in Dallas, Havana Riverwalk Inn in San Antonio, the Four Seasons Hotel in Austin and Hotel Crescent Court in Dallas ranked 17, 29, 79 and 80, respectively, among the Travel + Leisure's Top 100 Hotels in the United States and Canada.

To see a full list of awards and rankings, visit www.travelandleisure.com/worldsbest/index.cfm.

TRAVEL NEWS

In a move that dwarfs that of all other airlines, United Airlines filed for bankruptcy listing $24.5 billion in assets. That is double the amount filed by Houston-based Continental in 1990, the Associated Press reports. This move by the world's No. 2 airline reinforces the lead for one Texas-based airline and makes way for another to step up.

Analysts told The Dallas Morning News that this was a chance for Fort Worth-based American Airlines to solidify its position as the world's top airline. Passenger traffic already is up at American's Chicago hub,

TEXAS IN THE MOVIES

With the initial hassles now out of the way, production begins this month on Alamo, the much publicized $80 million Disney movie project. Filming will take place on a private ranch in Dripping Springs, just west of Austin, where a full-scale model of the Alamo has been constructed.

The project was halted last summer when Oscar-winning director Ron Howard (A Beautiful Mind) pulled out after conflicts with Disney over the then-$125 million price tag. The new director is Texas native John Lee Hancock, who directed the 2001 Disney hit The Rookie. Dennis Quaid, star of The Rookie, will reunite with Hancock in Alamo and portray Sam Houston, while Billy Bob Thornton (Sling Blade) has been cast as Davy Crockett.

Filming begins Jan. 20, and Alamo is expected to hit movie theaters during the 2003 Thanksgiving-Christmas holiday season.
where it competes directly with United. Even so, American is still contending with its effort to keep its head above water and out of bankruptcy.

In preparation for fewer flights next spring, American Airlines plans to trim 1,100 flight attendant positions. Flight attendants have until Jan. 7 to exercise an option of job sharing or leaves of absence. After that, the airline will decide how many jobs actually need to be cut. The airlines also has asked employees to forgo a raise next year to save $130 million.

Meanwhile, Dallas-based Southwest Airlines fogs ahead with its low-fare, low-cost approach. Southwest posted $74.9 million profit in the third quarter while United lost $889 million that same period. The Associated Press reported.

As an effort to enhance the customer experience, Fort Worth-based Travelocity.com will expand its itinerary options from nine to 31. The expanded options put it on a more equal footing with the top online travel agencies, Expedia.com and Orbitz.com. Also mirroring its competitors, Travelocity.com will begin implementing a $5 booking fee for their airline tickets. The fee will help offset the losses of travel agency fees and will help to upgrade its technology.

Travel trends have forced industry insiders to make changes in their marketing and promotion strategies. Seventy-seven percent of the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) members have been focusing their efforts on markets within driving range and 66 percent have offered new discount rates in the past year. That’s in tune with TIA’s latest survey that shows about three-fourths of its members have noticed more of their customers are staying closer to home or taking last-minute trips. About as many also saw a decline in international visitors and an increase in vehicle travelers on a lower travel budget.

Aside from a shift in marketing, these factors have caused 40 percent of TIA members to implement reductions in staff, salaries and/or bonuses. On the positive side, 16 percent of places and attractions closer to major population centers say they have benefited from the “near home” mentality.

“The current economic situation, combined with a sluggish travel recovery and a decrease in traveler spending has forced the industry to employ a number of strategies, such as focusing on in-state or in-region markets,” said Dr. Suzanne Cook, senior vice president of research for TIA. “And just as TIA is doing on a national level, about half of our members are involved in more partnerships as a way to leverage scarce resources and make more impact.”

The biggest declines in travel volume were reported from organizations that primarily serve the international inbound visitors.

Despite the ebb and flow of traveler traffic, 68 percent of the TIA members are optimistic their businesses will improve in 2003.

MUSEUM NEWS

Beginning next month, the state’s first permanent collection of meteorites will be on display as the Oscar Monnig Meteorite Gallery opens its doors on the campus of Texas Christian University in Fort Worth.

The gallery, named for longtime Fort Worth businessman and meteor collector Oscar Monnig, will be housed in a 1,700-square-foot facility on the ground floor of TCU’s Sid Richardson Science Building. More than 1,000 specimens of meteorites that Monnig collected over a 50-year span will be on permanent display beginning in February.

“It is an extraordinary collection, and we are privileged to showcase it at TCU,” said Art Ehlmann, an emeritus professor at TCU who worked closely with Monnig identifying specimens collected from all across the world.

The museum will be open

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, TP&W MAGAZINE

To commemorate its 60th birthday in December, Texas Parks & Wildlife Magazine unveiled a special retrospective anniversary issue.

“We went back and read every single issue,” said Susan Ebert, TP&W Magazine’s publisher and editor. “We wanted to select the events, words, photos and art that would bring our history to life for our readers.”

The special issue features original artwork by Orville Rice, who painted color covers for Texas Game and Fish (the magazine’s original title) from the 1940s to the mid-‘50s. His style created a distinct visual identity for the magazine. While preparing for the special edition, the magazine staff discovered a Rice original that had not been used as a cover. This original artwork, featuring two pintails and two shovelers in flight over a dawn marsh, now graces the anniversary issue’s cover.

For more information, visit www.tpwmagazine.com.
from 1 to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday. Admission is free. For more information, call (817) 257-7270 or visit www.mooning.museum.tcu.edu.

Despite some inclement weather, Sugar Land’s Museum of Southern History recently celebrated its grand opening featuring keynote speaker Congressman Tom DeLay.

The museum, in an amazing building modeled after Thomas Jefferson’s retreat, Poplar Bluff, features primarily 19th century displays that offer a glimpse of technical, cultural and technological aspects of southern society. In addition, more than 20 ‘battle’ flags and artifacts from the Civil War, provided by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, are on display on the museum’s first floor.

Museum hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Friday and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday. For more information, call (281) 639-7171 or visit www.museumof.southernhistory.org.

The Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens, the American decorative arts wing of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston will temporarily close in January and February while repairs are being made to the footbridge that crosses Buffalo Bayou from the parking lot to the grounds. The house and gardens will reopen on Saturday, March 1, just in time for the annual Azalea and traditional costumes are also part of the display. The hands-on exhibit takes you back in time with an authentic kitchen complete with a walk-in pantry filled with artifacts and stored goods. For more information, go to www.texanculture.utsa.edu.

TRIBUTE TO A GHOST TOWN

The new W.K. Gordon Center for Industrial History of Texas, which chronicles the rise and fall of Thurber, opened recently in the Erath County town.

Coal mining began in Thurber when the company-owned town was founded in 1886. Within a couple of years, it became the largest coal mining community in Texas and helped fuel the westward expansion of railroads. A brick factory, which produced much of the brick used in early Texas highways and streets, was added in 1897.

At its peak, Thurber’s population was about 10,000. But after demand for coal declined, the mines closed in 1926 and the brick factory closed in 1931. Before long, Thurber became a ghost town.

The center will also be a research facility for nearby Tarleton State University.

Thurber is off Interstate 20, about 40 miles southwest of Weatherford and 70 miles west of Fort Worth. For more information on Thurber or the new W.K. Gordon Center for Industrial History of Texas, visit www.thurbertexas.com.

UNITY DINNER 2003

Texas Travel Industry Association gears up for its much-anticipated annual Unity Dinner. This year, they salute Texas sports and their impact on state tourism. Unity Dinner 2003, featuring more than 1,000 travel and tourism representatives, legislators and elected officials, is scheduled for Feb. 26 at the Austin Convention Center.

Those attending can also participate in a golf tournament, silent auction, seminar, luncheon, reception, Capitol tours, a presentation by Sports Illustrated and entertainment by the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders.

B&B AT ITS BEST

Wimberley’s Blair House Inn has been listed by Arrington’s Bed and Breakfast Journal as one of the top three inns nationwide in the category of “Best Evening Cuisine.” Customers of the various inns cast the votes. Winners were listed in the magazine’s December issue and can also be viewed at www.bnbjournal.com.

Cruising Along

Carnival Cruise Lines will launch their first seven-day cruise program from Galveston with Elation, a 2,052-passenger liner beginning in fall 2003. The 70,000-ton Elation, currently based in Los Angeles, will begin service from Galveston Sunday, Sept. 28, 2003, offering a one-of-a-kind “exotic” seven-day western Caribbean cruise program featuring a daylong call at Belize City, Belize; as well as visits to Cozumel and Progreso/Merida, Mexico.

The 2,124-passenger Carnival Pride, currently homeported in Port Canaveral, Fla., will reposition to the West Coast to assume the Elation’s popular seven-day Mexican Riviera program Sunday, Sept. 21, 2003.

“Southern California and Texas are both popular and convenient embarkation points for cruise vacations and we are very enthused to be increasing capacity from the Los Angeles area and Galveston by introducing these larger, amenity-laden ships into those markets,” said Bob Dickinson, Carnival president.

CRUISE LINE ANNOUNCES MAJOR PRESIDENT’S WEEKEND ENHANCEMENTS

Carnival Cruise Lines has announced several major enhancements to its President’s Weekend cruises in the Western Caribbean, including a one-night Mexican Riviera cruise and extended stays in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

The three-night cruises will sail out of Galveston, Texas, on Carnival’s newest vessels: the 70,000-ton Elation, beginning Oct. 30, 2003, and the 132,000-ton Koningsdam, which makes its debut in early 2004.

The new cruise program will feature a Mexican Riviera cruise, which includes calls to Cozumel, Huatulco, Puerto Vallarta and Mazatlan. Carnival guests will also have the option to extend their stay in San Juan, Puerto Rico, for a total of five days and four nights, beginning Thursday, Nov. 6, 2003.

Carnival’s President’s Weekends have been popular with the American Golf Association, which is not only a major cruise line embarkation market but also a major consumer of cruise vacations.

UNIVERSITY DINNER 2003

Want to join in the festivities and don’t want your spot reserved yet? You may want to get on the ball. The tables sell out quickly.

Go to www.UTTA.org to reserve your table. Seats are assigned on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Sports Illustrated, American Airlines, San Marcos Convention and Visitors Bureau and The Dallas Cowboys sponsor the dinner.

CRUISINE IS CHAMPIONED AT THE 2003 ![B&B AT ITS BEST](image)

A GHOST TOWN TRIBUTE TO listed in the magazine’s December issue and can also be viewed at www.bnbjournal.com.
AMARILLO'S NEW T.I.C.  Travel counselors in Amarillo will have more room for that wealth of information, and customers will be welcomed by an updated and warm facility. This month marks the completion of the new T.I.C. building there.

Enter the Texas ranch-style gate and discover the new, contemporary structure that is almost 5,300 square feet larger than the 3,786-square-foot confines of the old building. This building fits nicely into the landscape with its Palo Duro Canyon-esque motif, a dry creek and custom metal cow sculptures on 15 acres. It features a fireplace, video room, display case, additional truck parking and 24-hour restrooms. It is also more easily accessible to eastbound and westbound traffic on I-40, as well as from the Amarillo Airport.

A formal dedication is tentatively set for early May.

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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*Compared to last year