

**A MAJOR PRODUCTION** Twenty-two film projects wrapped in Austin in 2001, bringing an estimated \$61 million to the local economy. In fact, Los Angeles was the only place that hosted more filming last year, according to Gary Bond, director of film marketing for the **Austin CVB**. One reason filmmakers are flocking to town is **Austin Studios**, a film-production facility that opened in November 2000 on the grounds of the city's old Robert Mueller Airport.

*The Life of David Gale*, an upcoming film starring Kevin Spacey and Kate Winslet, wrapped up a six-month shoot at the end of last year, bringing millions of dollars to local hotels, restaurants, and other businesses. Texas filmmaker Robert Rodriguez finished filming *Spy Kids 2* in Austin in February. Later this year, production will begin on a major studio feature—*The Alamo*.

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### LAST CALL!

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### TOURISM PROJECTS WIN FEDERAL FUNDS

**W**ith more than \$14 million in federal funding, **10 new**, locally operated **visitor centers** will be established around the state. The new visitor centers will be built (or, in some cases, set up in newly restored historic structures) in **Baird, Canadian, Itasca, Jefferson, Kingsville, Midland, and Ozona**. Other locations include the **Fulton Mansion State Historic Site** in **Fulton**, **San Jacinto Battleground State Historic Site** near **LaPorte**, and the **World Birding Center** at **Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley State Park** in **Mission**. All projects are in the planning stages.

The visitor centers are among more than 100 projects approved for funding through TxDOT's Statewide Transportation Enhancement Program. This federal initiative, administered through the states, is designed to support transportation enhancements—such as hike-and-bike trails, tourist centers, and landscaping and scenic beautification projects.

Here's a closer look at plans for one of the new centers. With funding totaling more than \$1 million,

Crockett County and the **Ozona Chamber of Commerce** will build a **visitor center** at the intersection of I-10 and Texas 163. According to chamber estimates, more than 24,000 vehicles pass the location each day. Executive Director Shanon Biggerstaff says the chamber is looking forward to the opportunity to direct some of those travelers to the sites and services available in Ozona. The visitor center will feature 24-hour rest rooms; a large, shaded porch; and a walking trail—landscaped with native plants—for visitors and their pets.

For the complete list of approved projects, see [www.dot.state.tx.us/tdotnews/newsrel/list.htm](http://www.dot.state.tx.us/tdotnews/newsrel/list.htm).

**I**n the same round of federal funding, the **Texas Historical Commission** landed \$4.1 million to **expand its Texas Heritage Trails Program**. "This regional tourism initiative helps revitalize towns, increases visitation to cultural and historic sites, and raises awareness of the importance of historic preservation to the tourism industry," says Program Director Janie Headrick.

Three heritage trails are already up and running: the Texas Forest Trail, the Texas Forts Trail, and the Texas Independence Trail. With the new funds, the Texas Historical Commission will develop **four more heritage trails**, although the specific projects are still to be determined. Long-range plans call for a total of 10 Texas Heritage Trails, so

funding for the four additional trails puts the commission well on the way toward its goal. All 10 trails have been identified, so the next four trails will be selected from among the remaining concepts: **Brazos, Hill Country, Lakes, Mountain, Pecos, Plains, and Tropical**.

Regional groups will work with the commission to apply for the four slots. Applications will be due June 3 and Dec. 2. To learn more, call (512) 463-6092 or see [www.thc.state.tx.us/heritagetourism/hthttp.html](http://www.thc.state.tx.us/heritagetourism/hthttp.html). Also see the "FAQs" link for answers to frequently asked questions.

### PLACES

**R**oyal Olympic Cruises has announced its return to the **Port of Houston** with a line-up of **weekly sailings through April 2003**. The *Olympia Voyager's* first run of the season—a 10-day cruise to Mexico, Honduras, Belize, and Guatemala—will depart March 20. Then, beginning March 30, the ship will launch its weekly, seven-day "Mayaribbean" sailings to ports including Playa del Carmen, Mexico; Puerto Cortez, Honduras; and Belize City, Belize. See [www.royalolympiccruises.com](http://www.royalolympiccruises.com).

Royal Olympic's addition of **year-round service** out of Houston is part of larger **cruise-industry trends** reported in the Feb. 3 *New York Times*. After Sept. 11, occupancy levels dropped drastically, with many cruises operating at less than 50 percent capacity—compared to



**TRAVEL TALES OVERHEARD**

from TxDOT's Travel Information Centers

**AMARILLO T.I.C.** The center landed some great publicity in February when Supervisor Rosemary Eaves appeared on the local KVII television news. For a feature called "Neighbors," someone at the station throws a dart at an Amarillo city map and a reporter heads out to do an interview wherever it lands. This time the dart struck near the T.I.C., and Rosemary was interviewed for a 90-second spot. When the reporter asked Rosemary about her favorite places in Texas, she covered a lot of territory: the Big Bend area and the outlet malls!

**TEXARKANA T.I.C.** A team of architects hired by the Arkansas Parks and Tourism Department took pages of notes during a recent visit to the center. The Arkansas agency has hired the architects to design two new travel information centers to be located in Texarkana, Ark. According to T.I.C. Supervisor Linda Vaughan, an Arkansas official told the architects to use the Texas center as a role model. Linda gave the architects a tour and says they were particularly impressed with the video-viewing room and the design of the center's behind-the-scenes spaces.

**TEXAS TRAVEL LOG**

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a 10-year average of 90 percent, according to the *Times*. In response, cruise lines offered their "broadest and steepest discounts ever," the paper says—"more so even than during the Persian Gulf war in 1991." In addition, many cruise lines have suspended operations in the eastern Mediterranean, moving **more ships to U.S. home ports** to sail itineraries in Alaska, the Caribbean, Mexico, and the Panama Canal. And with some travelers reluctant to fly, a few cruise lines are offering **bus service** to carry passengers to and from their cruise port. **Royal Caribbean** will be offering this service to and from **Galveston** with stops in **Dallas, Austin, and San Antonio**.

The **rock-bottom** cruise fares probably **won't continue**, though, according to *The Wall Street Journal*. "Emboldened by the slow but **steady recovery in the travel business**," the *Journal* reports, "**hotels, cruise lines, and airlines are moving prices higher**."

**C**onstruction on a **\$130 million expansion** of the **Dallas Convention Center** is slated to wrap up in September—just days before some 10,000 engineers are scheduled to meet there. When the two-year project is complete, the facility will offer more than a million square feet of exhibit space. The centerpiece of the project is a new, column-free exhibit hall—the largest of its kind in the world—with 203,000 square feet of floor space and 40-foot ceilings.

**T**he **Greater Houston CVB** has opened a **new satellite office in Washington, D.C.** The D.C. office was established to strengthen the CVB's convention sales department—and give the Houston area an advantage in landing national association and government conventions. National Convention Sales Manager **Sean Cleary**, who has 14 years of experience in the industry, will head up the office. The Greater Houston CVB also has satellite offices in Austin and Chicago.

**H**ouston's **Orange Show Foundation** has purchased the landmark **Beer Can House**, which is "nationally celebrated as a **gem of folk creativity**," according to the *Houston Chronicle*. The Beer Can House is just what it sounds like—an old bungalow covered and decorated with an estimated 13,000 vintage beer cans. The foundation plans to restore the folk-art masterpiece and open it as a **gallery** and gift shop by spring 2003. In the meantime, visitors may drive by the Beer Can House, at 222 Malone, for a look at the outside.

Travelers also can enjoy the Orange Show Foundation's original, namesake project: the **Orange Show**—one man's whimsical monument to the orange. This Houston folk-art treasure, at 2401 Munger, opens its 2002 season

March 16. Visitors are welcome on weekend afternoons through mid-December. For more information on additional summer hours—and a peek at the indescribable Orange Show—see [www.orangeshow.org](http://www.orangeshow.org).

To learn more about either site, contact the Orange Show Foundation at (713) 926-6368.

**THE BIG ONE**

**H**ats off to the **San Antonio CVB**, which recently landed the **largest convention in the city's history**—an international Alcoholics Anonymous gathering with **55,000 attendees**. The convention, scheduled for July 2010, is expected to bring more than \$50 million to the San Antonio-area economy.

**ON DISPLAY** Congratulations to the following cities and tourism organizations, which have been awarded **free exhibit space** in TxDOT Travel Information Centers. From March 1–Aug. 31, these areas will be promoting their attractions with displays—including colorful photographs and other promotional materials—in the centers' lobbies. Every six months, use of the display cases rotates to another set of tourism organizations. For the next display period, September 2002–February 2003, TxDOT will accept applications June 1–20. For more information, see [www.dot.state.tx.us/insdtdot/orgchart/trv/trvtic/displays.htm](http://www.dot.state.tx.us/insdtdot/orgchart/trv/trvtic/displays.htm) or call the Travel Services office at (512) 486-5800.

City/ Organization	Travel Information Center
Midland and Odessa CVBs	Anthony
Texas Independence Trail	Denison
Brownsville CVB	Langtry
Waco CVB	Laredo
I-10 Corridor Association	Orange
Southern Brazoria County	Texarkana
Texas Forest Trail Region	Valley
Central Texas Bluebonnet Travel Council	Waskom



TEXAS IN THE PRESS

**V**iva Los Fresnos!" Those were the final words of a Jan. 28 *Austin American-Statesman* feature about **Little Graceland**, a "one-man-folk-art-roadside-tribute" to Elvis Presley. Little Graceland—a museum established by Simon Vega, one of Elvis' Army buddies—put the South Texas town of Los Fresnos on the tourist map. The site features a scaled-down replica of Elvis' childhood home, a front gate just like the one at Graceland, and a two-room museum with black-and-white snapshots and other Elvis memorabilia.

Twice a year—to mark Elvis' birthday in January and the anniversary of his death in August—Little Graceland hosts parties featuring music and, of course, Elvis impersonators. Mark your calendars for this summer's celebration, which will take place the afternoon of Aug. 17. Little Graceland is on W. Ocean Blvd. (Texas 100); (956) 233-5482.

**A**marillo and the **Panhandle** scored a grand slam with a **syndicated travel feature** that has appeared in at least **11 newspapers** nationwide and in Canada. The article, published this winter, mentions many attractions in the region: **Cadillac Ranch, Palo Duro Canyon State Park** (and the nearby **Elkins Ranch**), **Alibates Flint Quarries National Monument**, and Amarillo's stretch of old **Route 66**—the **Sixth Street** historic district. Other highlights include the Cowboy Morning breakfast at **Figure 3 Ranch**, the **American Quarter Horse Heritage Center and Museum**, the **Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum**, and Texas Tech's **National Ranching Heritage Center**. Newspapers printing the feature include the (Colorado Springs) *Gazette*, *Indianapolis Star*, *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, *Buffalo (N.Y.) News*, (Raleigh, N.C.) *News & Observer*, *Dallas Morning News*, *Contra Costa* (Calif.) *Times*, *Reading (Pa.) Eagle*, and *Vancouver Sun*.

FACES

**T**exas Parks and Wildlife has named **Robert L. Cook** as its **new executive director**. Cook began his career with the agency in 1965, then served as a private ranch manager in the 1980s before returning to Texas Parks and Wildlife in 1990. He rose to the top of the agency's Wildlife Division and then advanced to chief operating officer. Cook also served as interim director following the resignation of Andrew Sansom at the end of last year.

LONE STAR RANKINGS

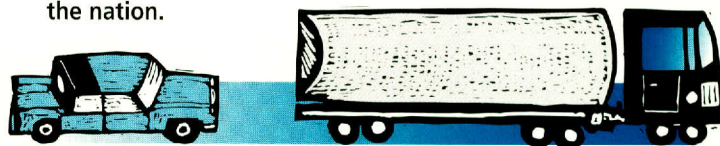
**T**hree Texas hot spots made the *Utne Reader's* list of "America's 60 Best Public Places." The list, which appeared in the magazine's January-February issue, celebrates an "eclectic assortment of favorite hangouts" nationwide. "The soul of America is found not just in purple mountain's majesty," writer Jay Walljasper says, "but also corner coffee shops, neighborhood playgrounds, and Main Streets."

Two of the Texas places on the list are among the old faithfuls of the Lone Star State: **Austin's Barton Springs Pool** and the **San Antonio River Walk**. But the third spot may not be quite so familiar—**Staples Street Bus Station** in **Corpus Christi**. The *Utne Reader* calls it "one of the world's finest bus stops." Thousands of passengers use the transit center daily—and enjoy its tree-lined, downtown plaza. Local residents, including schoolchildren, painted the 1,500 colorful tiles that decorate the station's entryway, benches, and planters.

MUSEUM NEWS

**C**anyon's **Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum** has friends in high places. Twelve paintings from the museum's Southwestern art collection are being shipped to the U.S. Embassy to the **Vatican** through the U.S. State Department's **Art in Embassies Program**. Among the canvases

**KEEP ON TRUCKIN'** Good news for those planning a road trip: **Texas roads rank fourth best** in the nation, according to a poll of professional truckers. The survey—published by *Overdrive* magazine—cites potholes, patches, cracks, traffic, and construction among the factors that professional drivers consider when naming the worst—and best—roads in the nation.



are two by Texas artist Frank Reaugh depicting landscapes of the Lone Star State.

EXHIBITS

**C**rockett mania will reign again at the **Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin** March 2–Aug. 18. The Davy Crockett craze swept the nation in the 1950s, thanks to the TV series starring Fess Parker. A new exhibit, *Sunrise in His Pocket: The Life, Legend, and Legacy of Davy Crockett*, will examine both the man and the myth, digging into the history and the folklore surrounding the Texas hero. Artifacts on display include Crockett's personal letters, plus a selection of pop-culture icons—dime novels, the rifle Fess Parker carried in the *Davy Crockett* TV series, and the buckskin costume John Wayne wore in the 1960 movie *The Alamo*. The museum is at 1800 N. Congress Ave.; (512) 936-8746; [www.thestoryofalamos.com](http://www.thestoryofalamos.com).

WHAT'S COOKING?

**T**he **Texas Travel Industry Association** recently published *Texas Cooking*, a cookbook designed to tempt travelers to visit all corners of the Lone Star State. *Texas Cooking* features color photos and recipes from all over the state—and from famous Texans including **Barbara Bush** and celebrity chef **Grady Spears**. Also among the recipes are **George W. Bush's** Brisket

and **Laura Bush's** Cowboy Cookies. For more information, call TTIA at (512) 476-4472 or see [tourtexas.com/ttia](http://tourtexas.com/ttia). Also look for *Texas Cooking* at your local bookstore.

**TEXAS TRIVIA**

**Who was the last messenger from the Alamo?**

John Smith. The Virginia-born Smith, who settled in San Antonio in 1827, joined the defenders of the Alamo in early 1836. Santa Anna arrived on Feb. 23 with an army of 1,800 and held the Alamo—which was defended by less than 200 men—under siege for more than a week. Just days before Santa Anna ordered the decisive assault on the Alamo, its commander, William B. Travis, wrote a final plea for help and put the letter in Smith's hands. Smith shipped through the enemy lines and rode toward Washington-on-the-Brazos where the Convention of 1836 was meeting. On March 2, the convention delegates adopted the Texas Declaration of Independence. A few days later, they received Travis' last appeal for reinforcements, but the Alamo fell to Santa Anna and his troops on March 6.

John Smith went on to fight in the Texan triumph at the Battle of San Jacinto on April 21. After Texas won its independence, Smith and his family returned to San Antonio, where he later served as mayor. Smith had married Maria de Jesus Delgado Curbeo, whose ancestors were among the Canary Islanders who settled in San Antonio in the 18th century. Before his death in 1845, Smith also was elected to the Senate of the Republic of Texas.

**TEXAS TRIVIA**



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

<b>NUMBERS</b> as of January 31, 2002				
<b>TRAVEL CENTER</b>	<b>Month Visitors</b>	<b>Percent Variation*</b>	<b>Visitors Year-to-Date</b>	<b>Percent Variation*</b>
AMARILLO	7,284	+2.06	7,284	+2.06
ANTHONY	16,584	+18.07	16,584	+18.07
DENISON	23,220	+51.91	23,220	+51.91
GAINESVILLE	25,680	+21.78	25,680	+21.78
LANGTRY	6,024	+9.31	6,024	+9.31
LAREDO	8,799	+30.07	8,799	+30.07
ORANGE	38,703	+11.11	38,703	+11.11
TEXARKANA	29,484	+13.72	29,484	+13.72
VALLEY	35,361	-31.49	35,361	-31.49
WASKOM	28,344	+34.03	28,344	+34.03
WICHITA FALLS	12,705	+16.09	12,705	+16.09
CAPITOL	5,847	-8.45	5,847	-8.45
<b>CENTER TOTALS</b>	<b>238,035</b>	<b>+14.57</b>	<b>238,035</b>	<b>+14.57</b>

\*Compared to last year

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