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T E X A S Travel Log

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE TEXAS TRAVEL INDUSTRY

T x D O T

Hats off to **Bob Spence**, director of tourism and sports for the **Arlington C&VB**, who received the **1997 Gene Phillips Hospitality Award** at last month's Texas Travel Counselors Conference (TTCC) in Arlington. The award is presented each year by TxDOT's Travel and Information Division to honor a tourism professional for contributions to the \$25.4 billion Texas travel industry and for support of the state's tourism program. Division director **Doris Howdeshell** said Bob Spence exemplifies the true spirit of the industry's public/private partnership by making frequent visits to the Texas Travel Information Centers, where he shares Metroplex news and provides counselors with the most current travel literature. The award is named in honor of Gene Phillips, who was manager of Aquarena Springs in San Marcos and a driving force in the emerging tourism industry in the 1970s.

The most coveted award in Texas travel counseling went to **Jan Autry**, counselor at the **Gainesville Texas Travel Information Center**. Jan was chosen by her peers to receive this year's prestigious **Roadrunner Award**, also presented at TTCC. The award recognizes her superior service to the Travel and Information Division, the traveling public and to the state. Travel Services director **Milton Meharg** applauded Jan's willingness to contribute whatever necessary to get the job done and for her service on numerous committees and special projects. Jan is a Certified Professional Travel Counselor on both the state and national levels.

A new award was created this year to honor other Travel and Information Division employees for their outstanding contributions to the Texas travel and tourism industry, and for their exceptional support of the TICs and other sections within the division. So it came as no surprise when **Mike Talley** was selected as the first-ever recipient of the **Lone Star Award**. Mike has always been a steadfast supporter of his fellow employees, letting them in on the ins and outs of the division and the exciting business of tourism. He remains a champion of Texas attractions and C&VBs, offering advice, encouragement and friendship day after day. And all in between his duties as manager of Travel Literature and editor of the *Texas State Travel Guide*. No one is more deserving of this year's Lone Star Award than Edward M.

COMING UP

Dallas developer Raymond D. Nasher, owner of the finest private sculpture collection in the world, will build a free public park next to the Dallas Museum

of Art, where he plans to display 66 major outdoor sculptures on a rotating basis. According to *The Dallas Morning News*, the Nasher Foundation will own, manage and maintain the \$32-million **Nasher Sculpture Garden**, collaborating with the Dallas Museum of Art on programming, exhibitions and promotion. Other cities boast outdoor sculpture gardens, but none in the heart of downtown and none with rotating exhibitions. When it opens in 1999, the Nasher Sculpture Garden could draw an additional 150,000 visitors each year and pump \$11 million annually into the local economy. Through the eyes of the art world, the new attraction will assure Dallas its proper place on the international map.

During the first week of August, visitors to the Texas Hill Country will find **Fredericksburg On Sale!** The Fredericksburg C&VB, Chamber of Commerce and area businesses are planning a promotional program designed to encourage weekday travel to their hometown. Participating businesses will offer 10 percent and better discounts on all merchandise, August 4-10. A special

flag will fly outside stores to alert shoppers to the best bargains in town. For more information, call 210/997-6523.

P L A C E S

On March 30, solemn members of the **Alabama-Coushatta** Indian tribe watched helplessly as the museum and gift shop on their reservation near **Livingston** turned into a charred heap of wreckage and memories. A devastating fire destroyed priceless artifacts dating from the 1700s and a gift shop inventory valued at \$250,000. Tribal council chairman **Roland Poncho** said the gift shop and museum provided 40 percent of all jobs at the reservation during the peak tourist season. The tribe hopes to rebuild facilities by March of next year.

In the February 1997 issue of *Texas Travel Log*, we told you how the citizens of **Hico** had revived the vitality of their hometown with new businesses, Saturday night hoedowns and a full schedule of festivals and events. Get ready to chalk up another one



TALES OF THE WEST The Southwest Collection library and research center opened last month at Texas Tech University in Lubbock. The 78,000-square-foot building houses 50,000 books on the American West and Southwest, 35,000 photographs, 4,500 oral history tapes, 1,500 newspaper and magazine titles and 9,300 reels of film. Topics range from the disbanded Southwest Conference to the country's best research collection on the Vietnam War. Call 806/742-3749 for details.

TRAVEL TALES OVERHEARD

for this small Texas community when the **Texas Cowboy Hall of Fame** opens for business later this month. Local artist **Bobby Kerr** and wife **Susan** have turned the back part of their Cowboy Art gallery into a museum, saluting rough-riding, top-notch world champions. Photographs and cowboy memorabilia will tell the tale of each Texas champ. Videotapes of rodeos, cutting horse events and other competitions will spotlight the cowboys in action. At 408 N. Second Street. For more info, call 817/796-2462.

Mesa Airlines launches passenger service this month between Meacham International Airport in **Fort Worth** and Hobby Airport in **Houston**. *The Dallas Morning News* reports Mesa brings an established name and 50-seat Canadair regional jets, the latest innovation among commuter carriers. Wall Street analysts and scholars are intrigued by the idea of flying regional jets outside major carriers' hubs, and without knowing the demand from Meacham, an airport without successful passenger service since the 1950s. But Mesa executives say they carefully selected their strategy in their push beyond the traditional bounds of the regional airline business. Any resemblance to



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Ann Kelton, Editor
 Contributing Editors: Jane McNally, John Russell, Mike Talley
 Layout: Jane Yansky Design

AMARILLO TIC Just when they thought spring had sprung, counselors were inundated with phone calls and visits from panicky travelers during a snow storm on April 25. "It's raining to the north of us. It's raining to the south and east of us," counselor Margie Faulkner said. "We're the only ones around here getting snow. It's just not fair!"

LAREDO TIC Hidden behind a great mound of dirt sits the Laredo TIC, where Certified Professional

Travel Counselors stay primed and ready to read travel maps turned upside down, hoping some clever tourists find their way. Construction of a new overpass required demolition of the pedestrian bridge that allowed southbound travelers access to the center. To make matters worse, piles of dirt and construction debris obstruct the view to the TIC building. Counselor Joe Paz said, "We've redone the files, reorganized the travel literature stock. We've just about run out of things to redo."

WASKOM TIC It was too ugly. It was too cool. Actually, it depended on which counselor you talked to. A strange contraption christened *Star Streak* came rambling into the center parking lot last month on its way to the Pate Swap Meet in Cresson. A Florida couple had converted a 1978 El Dorado Cadillac into a travel trailer, complete with sleeping quarters, kitchen and AC. "Too ugly," insisted Donna Watson. "Too cool," argued Tonja Rudd.

Southwest Airlines, they said, is intentional. Flights to San Antonio will begin June 1, followed by Austin in 1998.

Q-Zar, the largest laser tag operator and manufacturer in the world, chose **Mesquite**, Texas, for the unveiling on April 26 of its first **Q-City**, Fun Capital of the World. The 50,000-square-foot complex provides a fun, safe, nonalcoholic environment for the untapped teen market by offering the widest selection of interactive, state-of-the-art entertainment activities. Billing itself as the entertainment mall of tomorrow, the 21st-Century city transports young people to a high-tech world, complete with high-energy music, multi-level entertainment and giant overhead video walls. Open daily at 3544 Emporium Circle. For the latest scoop on the city without limits, call 972-682-6800.

For generations, stories have been told about ghost-like creatures seen around the murky waters of the bayou. Now, for a limited time only, you can enter a Cajun swamp village filled with ancient cypress trees, Spanish moss and eerie sounds at (why not?) the **Fort Worth Zoo**. Visitors can see rare white alligators, turtles, frogs and snakes at **Ghosts of the Swamp**, May 10 through

July 31. Entrance to this special exhibit included in regular zoo admission. Open daily at 1989 Colonial Parkway. For the latest zoo news, call 817/871-7000.

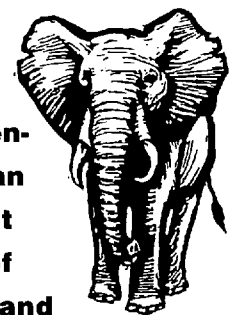
Travel America magazine has named the **Fort Worth Zoo** one of America's best. "A Zeal for Zoos," published in the January/February 1997 issue, highlights 14 zoos that author **Allen Nyhuis** feels are superior to the rest. Other zoos mentioned include the San Diego Zoo, the Bronx Zoo and the National Zoo in Washington, D.C.

The Texas General Land Office's first **Coastal Community Award** went to **Port Aransas** for the city's long-term commitment to dune and beach preservation and for its creative diversity in cultivating coastal resources. The honor was reported by *The Explorer*, a quarterly newsletter published by the Texas Coastal Bend Regional Tourism Council.

The **Greater Houston C&VB**, the City of Houston Department of Aviation and five international airlines will target the interna-



LIVING LARGE The El Paso Zoo's Asian elephant exhibit debuted last month as the centerpiece of the zoo's new Asian section. Visitors were taught about the care and feeding of Asian elephants in captivity and about the mammal's endangered status in the wild. The state-of-the-art exhibit is seven times larger than the old facility. A new high-tech hydraulic elephant care and restraint device makes caring for the animals safer for staff members. Call 915/521-1850 for more info.



tional tourism market with an aggressive promotional campaign. A *Destination Planning Guide*, printed in English, Spanish, French and German, highlights everything Houston has to offer for both tour groups and leisure travelers, and will be sent to group tour operators and travel agents who coordinate travel packages to the United States. A new CD-ROM will lead key clients on a visual journey through Houston International Airport and the city. For details, call the C&VB at 713/227-3100.

Experience the day-to-day excitement of offshore drilling at the just-opened **Ocean Star**, a refurbished jack-up rig on **Galveston Island**, stationed off Pier 19. There, visitors will find a museum, educational attraction and working rig all rolled into one. Three decks of videos, equipment and interactive displays tell the story of offshore drilling, oil and gas production, marine transportation, environmental protection, pipelining and construction. The *Ocean Star* is a project of the Offshore Energy Center, a non-profit organization dedicated to educating the public about offshore oil and gas production. Open daily, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. (10 a.m. to 4 p.m. in winter); adults \$5, seniors and students \$4, and children under age seven free. Call 409/766-STAR for more info.

Don't laugh, but hundreds of Texans called in to **Ripley's Believe It or Not!** in **San Antonio** and **Grand Prairie** to vie for the not-so-prestigious title of **Lone Star Laugher** in the Third Annual Ripley's Oddest Laugh in Texas Contest. Ten finalists, judged on style, oddness and originality, will meet in Grand Prairie for the Ripley's Laugh Off Finals on May 28, when the winner will receive \$350 in cash. A Ripley's Believe It or Not! cartoon, syndicated to more than 170 newspapers in 42

countries, and a display in both Ripley's locations will immortalize this year's laugh champ. For information call 972/263-2391.

F A C E S

Bob Phillips was named president of **Classic Attractions Inc.**, the company that owns and operates the Palace of Wax and Ripley's Believe It or Not! in Grand Prairie and the Plaza Theatre of Wax and Ripley's in San Antonio. He replaces his brother Bill Phillips, who retired as president after 18 years. Bob is immediate past chairman of the Texas Travel Industry Association, a delegate to the White House



GATHER YOUR TRIBE Head for Livingston on June 6-7 for the Indian Powwow, held on the grounds of the Alabama-Coushatta Indian Reservation.

The 29th-annual event is known as one of the best tribal gatherings in the nation. Native Americans donned in colorful costumes and sacred feathers will vie for top dollar in gourd and intertribal dance competitions. Fine arts and crafts and traditional food round out this family event. For information, call 409/563-4391. For campground reservations, call 1-800-444-3507.

TEXAS TRIVIA
What do San Angelo, Russia and South Africa have in common?

San Angelo State Park not only attracts campers and anglers, but a host of historians and scientists, intrigued by traces of life left behind 290 million years ago. San Angelo joins Russia and South Africa as one of three places in the world where paleontologists have documented well-preserved tracks of Late Permian Age terrestrial mammals. Like vertebrates, pre-dating dinosaurs by 120 million years. The park boasts 22 different kinds of Permian period tracks when only 16 types of animals were thought to exist during that time. Visitors can also explore baby dinosaur trackways, Native American rock etchings dating to 600 A.D., artifacts from Fort Concho's frontier days and the burial site of the area's first Anglo visitor. The 7,700-acre park offers a treasure trove of history from an ancient past.



Conference on Tourism, executive committee member for the Dallas/Fort Worth Area Tourism Council and vice chairman of the Texas Department of Commerce Tourism Advisory Committee.

H I S T O R Y

On April 16, 1947, the French-owned ship *SS Grandcamp*, carrying ammonium nitrate fertilizer, exploded in **Texas City** harbor. The *SS High Flyer*, ignited by the first explosion, blew up sixteen hours later, in the midst of efforts to recover hundreds of dead and injured. Almost 600 people were killed and another 4,000 to 5,000 injured. The explosion was felt as far away as Port Arthur, blew two small planes out of the sky and registered as an earthquake on a Denver seismograph 900 miles away. *The Dallas Morning News* reports 50 years later to the minute, survivors bowed their heads in a moment of silence, remembering the 576 who died in the worst industrial disaster in the nation. The Texas City fire chief rang a single bell 50 times. And

wreaths of red and white flowers were taken to the graves of 63 unknown victims, where their memory is blessed with a fountain of angels in Memorial Park cemetery. More than 500 survivors contributed handwritten personal accounts about their experiences during the tragedy, inspiring a local historian and former teacher to publish a book, tentatively titled "We Were There."

M U S E U M S

After almost a year of extensive refurbishing and restoration, the **Overland Trail Museum** in **Fort Davis** celebrated its grand reopening April 6. Displays include a replica of a Fort Davis barbershop, historic survey equipment, early medical paraphernalia and a restored pioneer kitchen. Old photographs, branding irons, saddles, spurs and barbed wire offer a close-up look at the history of this West Texas cowboy town. Open Tuesdays and Fridays, 1 to 6 p.m., and Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; tours by appointment. Call 915/426-3161 for details.

TRAVEL CENTER	Month Visitors	Percent Variation*	Visitors Year-to-date	Percent Variation*
Amarillo	15,927	+23.81	51,633	+10.11
Anthony	12,351	-20.20	55,620	-16.03
Denison	19,161	+25.93	68,718	+11.40
Gainesville	26,556	+9.14	105,402	-2.40
Langtry	11,094	-1.78	37,383	-19.88
Laredo	5,109	-64.78	24,033	-58.20
Orange	37,683	-34.44	151,941	-36.80
Texarkana	33,540	-25.25	124,557	-29.60
Valley	22,959	-5.06	193,428	+3.56
Waskom	59,010	+12.72	203,244	+5.78
Wichita Falls	16,269	+2.65	62,067	-2.20
Capitol Complex	12,849	+36.14	38,244	+6.74
1-800 Phone Center	9,633	-27.96	36,156	-32.64
CENTER TOTALS	282,141	-9.35	1,152,426	-13.75

MAIL SERVICES	This Mo.	Y-T-D
	190,732	503,091
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Addresses transmitted	76,006	
Addresses transmitted		214,472

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Internet address: <http://traveltex.com>

Data as of April 30, 1997
*Compared to last year

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