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T E X A S Travel Log

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE TEXAS TRAVEL INDUSTRY

T x D O T

Don't forget to mark your calendar for March 17-21, when travel professionals from throughout the state will converge on **San Antonio** for the **41st Annual Texas Travel Counselors Conference**. Travel counselors and other folks from TxDOT, AAA, city C&VBs, and Texas Parks and Wildlife gather each spring for hospitality training, study tours, round table discussions, special guest speakers, and the ever-popular Texas Travel Industry Association Travel Fair. For this year's details, call **Milton Meharg**, TxDOT's Travel Services director, at 512/467-3716. For information on the TTIA Travel Fair, call **Vic Mathias** at 512/476-4472. See you there!

T T I A

It's not too late to sign up for the **Tourism Unity Dinner and Workshop**, sponsored each year by the **Texas Travel Industry Association**. On February 20, key players in the tourism industry will join forces at the **Austin Marriott** at the Capitol to assure Texas' place as the second most visited state in the nation. **Governor George W. Bush** takes the spotlight this year as the first Texas governor to become part of this important event. For further details, contact the TTIA office in Austin at 512/476-4472.

COMING UP

Holocaust Museum Houston will open the first week in March as one of the country's largest institutions of its kind. The new

building was designed by Ralph Appelbaum, known for his design of the popular U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. The museum will include a permanent exhibit hall, changing exhibit space, a memorial area, and sculpture garden. A 100-seat theater will feature a 30-minute oral history film on local Holocaust survivors and liberators. The museum will be open daily, and will offer guided tours every day but Saturday. At 5401 Caroline in Houston's Museum District. For details, call 713/942-8000.

Developers hope to build a \$6-million Mexican cultural and entertainment complex in northwest **Dallas**. **Plaza Mexico** would include a 90,000-square-foot conference center that would host banda, ranchera and Tejano musical acts and cross-cultural business meetings and trade shows. A 5,000-seat outdoor rodeo arena would feature Mexican equestrian and bull riding events. The second phase of the project includes plans for artists' shops, restaurants, and an

open-air mercado. The 30-acre site is west of Dallas Love Field, on Loop 482 between I-35E and Harry Hines Boulevard. Developers still await approval for the land's rezoning from the City Plan Commission and the Dallas City Council.

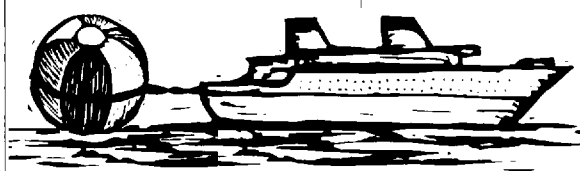
A shuttle service between hotels, attractions, and shopping areas in and around **Arlington's Entertainment District** will begin operation between April and June. The shuttle, which will be free to hotel guests, will run 365 days a year. Arlington C&VB president **Burke Pease** said reduced traffic and cleaner air will make Arlington a more desirable destination for the six million visitors the city hosts annually.

Texas Stadium in Irving could get a new name when it's expanded, reports *The Dallas Morning News*. It's likely that the Cowboys' home will be branded with a corporate sponsor's name. In return, the city could get millions in cash. Council member **Harry Joe** said, "Many cities

are finding that renaming a public arena or stadium is a way of deriving revenues without raising taxes. I think the trend is clearly there." Plans for expansion include installing a retractable roof, replacing the artificial surface with a grass field, and increasing seating capacity to position the area to host future Super Bowls (see January 1996 issue, *Texas Travel Log*).

P L A C E S

Six Flags Theme Parks Inc. became the new manager of **Fiesta Texas** in **San Antonio**, after an agreement was reached last month with **USAA**, the park's owner and developer. According to *The Dallas Morning News*, the 10-year management agreement includes an option for Six Flags to buy the park. When Fiesta Texas opened in spring 1992, its owners billed it as a musical show park. But when attendance slumped in its second year, owners spent \$7 million on more rides and activities rather than shows. Six Flags officials have already unveiled



FUN IDEAS AFLOAT Houston may become a new test market for the cruise line industry as early as 1997. The Houston

Port Authority has received letters of interest from major cruise lines about possible test cruises and serious consideration of Houston as a future home base. Early projections show that as many as 200,000 passengers could be sailing from Houston by the year 2000, producing a \$60 million local economic impact. Joining the ranks of cities like Miami, Tampa, Los Angeles, and New York as a cruise ship home port would elevate Houston tourism to a higher plane.

TRAVEL TALES OVERHEARD

plans for a major new ride called **The Joker's Revenge**. Based on "Batman" movies and comics, it will include a steel roller coaster that runs backwards and turns visitors upside down.

Out in Big Bend Country, proprietors of the historic Gage Hotel in **Marathon** have opened the **Captain Shepard's Inn**. Built in the late 1890s by Marathon founder Albion Shepard, the restored two-story adobe house includes five bedrooms with private baths, two sitting rooms, a dining room, and kitchen. The carriage house, out back, now serves as a two-bedroom bunkhouse. It's just a short walk from the Gage, where all facilities, including the pool, are available to inn visitors. Rates range from \$85 to \$120 per night, including breakfast. For reservations, call 1-800-884-4243.

Visitors traveling across the Texas Panhandle on I-40 may blink and miss the small community of **Groom**, but they won't have to look twice to see the recently erected **Cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ**, the second largest cross in the world. Standing 190 feet tall above the flat prairie just west of Groom, the cross can be seen for almost 20 miles. The arms extend 110 feet, with the entire structure weighing 2.5 million pounds. The cross was built and paid for by

TEXAS TRAVEL LOG

is published monthly by the Texas Department of Transportation, Travel and Information Division. Please send news items of interest to the Texas travel industry to Texas Travel Log, P.O. Box 141009, Austin, Texas 78714-1009. (512) 483-3727, FAX (512) 483-3793. Deadline for each newsletter is the 20th of the month preceding the issue date.

Ann Kelton, Editor

Contributing Editors: Jane McNally, Mike Talley

Layout: Jane Yansky Design

ANTHONY TIC Bob "Deadeye" Dudley sashayed into the center, and quicker than the eye could see, reached out with his itchy trigger-finger and grabbed a travel guide and a map. Counselor June Longenbaugh said the world champion fast-draw artist took time out to spin a few yarns and do a bit of bragging, Texas-style. The 67-year-old gunslinger is two-time winner of the Roy Rogers World Fast-Draw Championship, and holds a Guinness World Record, as well as numerous other world titles.

Pampa native **Steve** (and we didn't make this up) **Cross**. For nighttime travelers, the giant structure is lit up. The world's largest cross, at 500 feet tall, stands north of Madrid Spain.

Austin joined Nashville and Seattle on the enviable list of garnering the highest hotel occupancy rates in the country in 1995, reports the *Austin American-Statesman*. The Capital City was expected to close out the year at 77 percent. Industry consultant **Bruce Walker** said the number of room nights sold has gone up 5 percent every year over the last four years, making Austin the strongest hotel market in Texas. At least 1,000 hotel rooms now under construction are scheduled for completion this year.

Next time you're in **Austin**, drop by the Visitor Center at 201 E. Second Street and pick up a copy of the city's newest publication.

The Texas State Cemetery Historic Walking Tour brochure takes visitors on a self-guided tour through the "Arlington of Texas," where monuments mark resting places of nearly 2,000 Texas patriots and heroes. Three other brochures in a series of historic walking tours are available at local museums, libraries,

ORANGE TIC Manager Pam Crew said TxDOT finally closed the deal on the Blue Elbow Swamp. The land, which is behind the center, is the site for a new Travel Information Center, planned for the near future. Final plans should be approved within the next six months. More on this later. Much later.

Welcome back Joyce Naivar, who returned to the center as a part-time travel counselor. Joyce, who has worked at the center during peak summer

months, was a long-time employee at AAA and the Orange Chamber of Commerce. She's also married to the center's former manager Bill Naivar. It's good to have her "home."

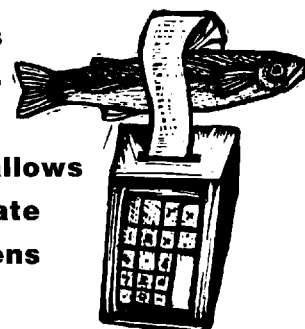
VALLEY TIC When the *Valley Morning Star* ran a contest entitled "How Well Do You Know the Valley?," expert travel counselor Letty Ramirez couldn't help herself. She entered the contest and (you guessed it) became one of only eight winners. Was there ever a doubt?

and TxDOT's Travel Information Centers. Or call the Austin C&VB at 1-800-926-2282.

The doors at the **Mesquite Opry** were shut and locked for the last time on December 30. After 14 years of singing, yodeling, and accompanying guests on the guitar, owner **Janet McBride** closed her country/Western show. McBride and her husband **John Ingram** bought an interest in the

show in 1981. They started a Saturday night tradition that attracted some stars and provided a stepping-stone for newcomers. McBride said it was her desire to fulfill a dream that sustained the opry these past several years. But the time constraints of running a business eventually caught up with them. The owners hope to find a buyer with the special brand of enthusiasm needed to let the show go on.

TAKING LICENSE Texas Parks and Wildlife Department introduced a new electronic system that allows hunters, anglers, and state park visitors to buy dozens of recreational licenses more conveniently. Pilot



sites were outfitted with the new system in December. By May 1, the rest of the more than 3,000 license vendors will abandon the manual process. The new system will enable outdoors enthusiasts to buy 34 different licenses, Texas Conservation Passports, and hunting and fishing stamps.

SPACE AGE

The **Greater Houston C&VB** became the first city tourist destination to put its quarterly visitors guide on the **World Wide Web** in Spanish. **Guia Oficial de Houston** provides tourists and convention delegates with useful information on dining, shopping, nightlife, accommodations, and transportation. For a look at Houston in Spanish or English, key in <http://www.houston-guide.com>.

Travel and tourism planners can now explore **Dallas'** many offerings through a new **CD-ROM**. Officials at the Dallas C&VB say it's the first and most comprehensive CD-ROM provided by a destination for marketing purposes. Detailed information covering nine areas of interest is presented with color photos, sound, video clips, and 3-D animation. The CD was made available to a select list of meeting planners and tour operators in late 1995, and is now available to other industry professionals for \$5 and to nonindustry users for \$10. It can be operated from Windows, Windows '95, Macintosh and Power Mac. For more info, call 214/746-6677.

With just the push of a button, visitors to **Sherman** can now find their way to many of the city's restaurants, hotels, shops, and attractions, anytime of the day or night. A **24-hour visitor information kiosk** opened in December at the Lone Star Exxon on U.S. 75 at U.S. 82. More than 50 ads by local businesses and attractions invite travelers to just "push their button." When they do, a city street map of Sherman lights the way to the location. The kiosk also features a small map of the region, which includes nearby Lake Texoma, and lists upcoming events. Then if visitors still have questions, a real live person can help with more details. For more info, call the Sherman Convention & Visitors Council at 903/893-1184.

WILDLIFE

The offspring of two **southern black rhino** from Zimbabwe was born December 29 at **Fossil Rim Wildlife Center** near **Glen Rose**. The 55-pound female was the only surviving birth of the species in the U.S. in 1995. Only ten zoological and wildlife facilities in the U.S. and Canada cooperate in the management of a population of 30 southern black rhino. Each birth is critical to maintaining a self-sustaining captive population, as well as to the ultimate survival of the species. As recently as 20 years ago, the wild population of black rhino was believed to be around 65,000. Now less than 2,500 roam the African plains, and only 1,400 of these are of the southern



TOOTIN' THEIR HORN The **Wildflower & Music Festival** in **Richardson** picked up its **seventh award of excellence** when it was honored as the **"Best Fair/Festival"** at the **International Special Events Society Convention**. For the **past three years the citizens of Richardson** have hailed spring with **four days of nonstop music, featuring everything from polka, bluegrass and country to pop, cultural and jazz**. **Mark your calendar now for April 25-28**. For a complete schedule, call 214/680-9567.

subspecies. The staff at Fossil Rim said mother and baby rhino are doing well, and will join other endangered species in the Intensive Management Area within a few months. For information on the black rhino or other wildlife programs, call 817/897-2960.

HISTORY

The **1903 Seth Thomas clock** that once graced the tower of **Houston's City Hall** is back on display in the Market Square Historic District. As part of a revitalization effort in historic downtown, the clock was installed in a new clock tower at the corner of Congress and Travis where City Hall once stood. The clock has not been on public view since 1948.

B&D Mills in Grapevine was one of the last structures of its kind in the nation when an unexplained fire consumed its wooden sections last October. Now the owners of the 93-year-old flour and feed mill are planning a combination historic attraction and commercial development. Design calls for the mill's three main floors to house a restaurant, brew pub, specialty stores and office space. Restorations for the 40,500-square-foot mill will cost more than \$1 million. The mill was the city's largest employer for much of Grapevine's history, and recognition from the Texas Historical Commission was pending at the time of the fire.

STATE PARKS

Some 40,000 acres of remote West Texas land have been donated to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, reports *The Dallas Morning News*. In addition, the donation came with an endowment to generate revenue for the maintenance of the property and to replace the \$7,600 in annual property taxes previously collected on the tract. The land, just west of the 215,000-acre Big Bend Ranch State Park, becomes the second largest park in the state. The property is adjacent to the Rio Grande in the Chinati Mountains, and is home to a wide array of wildlife, including 16 species of bats. Cabins, water tanks, and a road system are already in place. What a deal!

? TEXAS TRIVIA

Where in Texas is the "Leap Year Capital of the World"?

In 1988, the citizens of the two-state city of Anthony, on the Texas-New Mexico state line, sponsored the first-ever Worldwide Leap Year Festival and Birthday Party and declared their town the Leap Year Capital of the World. The celebration attracted national attention, and Anthony was officially honored with the title through proclamations signed by Texas Governor Bill Clements and New Mexico Governor Garrey Carruthers. Then on October 14, 1988, New Mexico Senator Pete Domenici entered a proclamation into the United States Congressional Record, which declared Anthony the Leap Year Capital of the World. Leap Year babies from across the U.S. have already signed up for this year's festivities, slated for February 29 through March 3.

TEXAS TRIVIA

TRAVEL CENTER	Month Visitors	Percent Variation*	Visitors Year-to-date	Percent Variation*
Amarillo	9,741	-.64	9,741	-.64
Anthony	15,171	-.39	15,171	-.39
Denison	12,720	-29.96	12,720	-29.96
Gainesville	23,622	-19.30	23,622	-19.30
Langtry	8,493	+1.58	8,493	+1.58
Laredo	13,185	+49.54	13,185	+49.54
Orange	50,442	+19.12	50,442	+19.12
Texarkana	42,237	-10.67	42,237	-10.67
Valley	64,074	+35.50	64,074	+35.50
Waskom	38,238	+2.46	38,238	+2.46
Wichita Falls	12,480	-3.99	12,480	-3.99
Capitol Complex	7,137	-24.26	7,137	-24.26
1-800 Phone Center	12,480	-41.85	12,480	-41.85
CENTER TOTALS	310,020	+7.3	310,020	+7.3

Data as of January 31, 1996

*Compared to last year

MAIL SERVICES	This Mo.	Y-T-D
	37,598	37,598
SERVICES TO THE TRAVEL INDUSTRY		
TxDOT TRAX System	This Mo.	Y-T-D
Subscriber inquiries	50	
Addresses offered	26,758	
Addresses transmitted	16,598	16,598
OFFICIAL STATE TRAVEL MAGAZINE		
Texas Highways print run		
This month		389,044
This month last year		364,545
This year-to-date		389,044
Last year-to-date		364,545

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

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