El Paso needed to address its partial dependence on ground water – especially in drought-like periods. An ACEC Texas member firm was engaged to create the Northeast El Paso Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR) Master Plan, which will expand the ASR field to defer the long-term and high-cost option of water importation.
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### ABOUT THE COVER

You don’t need to go far to experience all of nature’s beauty. From natural forests to tranquil lakes, Texas has it all.
The Texas Municipal League exists solely to provide services to Texas cities. Since its formation in 1913, the League’s mission has remained the same: to serve the needs and advocate the interests of its members. Membership in the League is voluntary and is open to any city in Texas. From the original 14 members, TML’s membership has grown to more than 1,150 cities. Over 16,000 mayors, councilmembers, city managers, city attorneys, and department heads are member officials of the League by virtue of their cities’ participation.

The League provides a variety of services to its member cities. One of the principal purposes of the League is to advocate municipal interests at the state and federal levels. Among the thousands of bills introduced during each session of the Texas Legislature are hundreds of bills that would affect cities. The League, working through its Legislative Services Department, attempts to defeat detrimental city-related bills and to facilitate the passage of legislation designed to improve the ability of municipal governments to operate effectively.

The League employs full-time attorneys who are available to provide member cities with information on municipal legal matters. On a daily basis, the legal staff responds to member cities’ written and oral questions on a wide variety of legal matters. The League annually conducts a variety of conferences and training seminars to enhance the knowledge and skills of municipal officials in the state. In addition, the League also publishes a variety of printed materials to assist member cities in performing their duties. The best known of these is the League’s monthly magazine, Texas Town & City. Each issue focuses on a variety of contemporary municipal issues, including survey results to respond to member inquiries.

For additional information on any of these services, contact the Texas Municipal League at 512-231-7400 or visit our website, www.tml.org.

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TML, MultiState Intergovernmental Employee Benefits Pool
Dear Texas City Official,

This month's focus on tourism has me very excited. In my travels around the State as your President-Elect and now as your President, I've felt almost like a tourist getting to experience all the great things Texas cities have to offer. I've been impressed! Without exception I have felt welcomed and valued.

Making tourists feel welcome doesn't happen by accident. Lots of strategy and planning go into making different towns and locations attractive to those who want to visit and generate those much-needed sales tax dollars. As great as the 1,215 Texas cities are on their own, it takes a little extra effort to get those tourists to come to your town in particular. No one, after all, will have near the time to visit them all!

In this issue, you’ll learn about some of the strategies you can pursue to put your popular destinations and hospitality over the top in the tourist world. Cities don’t do that alone—they partner with convention and visitor bureaus, chambers, hotels, and countless other groups to present a seamless picture of local hospitality. We do that in Midland, and I hope you’ll come visit us soon!

John B. Love III, CMO
Mayor Pro Tem
City of Midland
TML President
Submit Your TML Municipal Excellence Award Application

The TML Municipal Excellence Awards have been celebrating and inspiring municipal excellence and innovation for more than 25 years. The competition is divided into two population categories – cities under 25,000 and cities over 25,000. Within each of the two population categories, there are five subject categories which include city spirit, communication programs, management innovations, public safety, and public works.

The deadline to submit applications is June 7, but there is no time like the present to check out our online application system. Details about the award categories, the application process, and a link to the application website can be found on the TML Municipal Excellence Awards page at wwwtml.org under “Resources” and then “Municipal Excellence Awards.”

Exhibitor Booth Sales for TML Annual Conference Opens This Month

The 2019 TML Annual Conference and Exhibition will be held October 9-11 at the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center in San Antonio. Information about the exhibition, booth rates, sponsorship opportunities, and more are available online at www.tmlexhibits.org. On April 2, booth sales opened exclusively to TML associate members. General booth sales will begin on April 16 at 10:00 a.m.

The TML Annual Conference and Exhibition is the Texas Municipal League’s signature event and attracts an average of 3,000 participants from more than 300 Texas towns and cities, making it one of the nation’s largest gatherings of local government leaders. Attendee conference registration and housing will open mid-July.

**TML TRAINING CALENDAR
APRIL-MAY**

April 11
Legislative Status Report #2: Be Heard at the Capitol
Webinar

April 14-16
Government Finance Officers Association of Texas
Spring Institute
Austin

May 1
TML Hometown Workshop: Your Legal and Ethical Role as a Community Leader
Hurst

May 2-3
TML Grant Writing for Municipal Programs and Projects
Hurst

May 9
Legislative Status Report #3:
What to Expect in the Final Days
Webinar

May 15-17
Texas Municipal Human Resources Association
Annual Conference
Marble Falls

May 16-17
TML Small Town Conference
Granbury

May 22-24
TML Leadership Academy – Course Two
Georgetown

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Is the sky really falling?

No! But those electricity sales reps knocking at your City Hall door sure want you to believe it is! Why? Because holding fear of impending doom over your head is meant to sucker you into a costly long-term contract. Yet, energy market trends show supplies growing and prices remaining favorable years forward. So, why not contact TCAP for a calm, rational, appraisal of your options. Who are we? TCAP is Texas’ only by-cities-for-cities aggregator of electricity — the only entity of its kind the state allows to buy at wholesale from the market. No profit motive. No hidden gotchas. No flim-flam.

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"In the world of insurance, it’s almost always apples to oranges."

It is easy to apply your personal insurance experience to your expectations as a commercial consumer. Many of us have purchased a homeowners policy only to find out the initial price was fleeting and the coverage was not as advertised. How can you ensure you are protecting your entity and ensuring long-term stability of cost? Unfortunately, purchasing insurance is not a straightforward transaction and often consumers pay the price when it is time to have their claim paid. In this article, several "pitfalls" are discussed to help you make educated decisions related to your coverage.

What You Don’t Know Often Will Hurt You

In a conversation with an entity that had property coverage with a well-known commercial insurance carrier, it was learned that they had suffered a $30,000 dollar theft claim. Unfortunately, the insurance carrier denied the claim because they had a local alarm and not a central alarm. Unlike a license agreement for an application for your smartphone, the fine print matters with your coverage. It is vitally important to read the policy, paying particular attention to the exclusions and endorsements, so that you don’t pay a little just to wind up paying a lot later on during a claim. The following outlines some of the more important coverage pitfalls to look for when comparing policies.

Limits and Deductibles

The easiest components of a policy to compare are limits and deductibles. But it’s not as simple as the lowest deductible or the highest limit. The consumer is tasked with assessing the "sweet spot" for a deductible on a particular line of coverage. Part of that equation is determining the entity’s appetite for risk and reviewing the entity’s claims history. For example, if claims are infrequent for a particular line of coverage, then it might make sense to have a higher deductible, thus saving money on the cost side. The commercial market may try to convince a city that it needs higher limits through an umbrella policy. But the reality is that due to state tort caps, a city has many protections in place that limits the amount it can be held liable for. Instead of purchasing an umbrella, a city can simply choose higher limits for coverages that have a potential for more severe outcomes.

The policy then gets a little trickier to compare when looking at what is actually covered, as well as what is excluded. For example, are the defense costs covered inside or outside of the limits? If the defense costs are inside the limits of liability, there may be little left for the actual judgement. Many times, the most expensive part of the claim is the defense costs.

Another question to ask when comparing policies is whether it is occurrence based or claims made. This can have a huge impact on whether a claim is covered, as well as future costs associated with that coverage. Occurrence based coverage simply means the claim must occur during the coverage period for coverage to apply. In a claims made policy, the occurrence date is irrelevant; coverage hinges on whether the claim is made during the coverage period. So if a claim occurs during the coverage period, but the claim is not filed until after the coverage period and the entity has moved coverage to a different insurer, the insured would have no protection. The solution to this problem is to purchase "tail" coverage, which can be quite expensive, often eroding any cost savings.

Another common pitfall is ignoring accompanying endorsements. An endorsement can enhance or restrict coverage, so it is extremely important to review and understand any endorsements attached to the policy. For example, a declarations page might show a limit of $1 million per occurrence, but have an endorsement that actually decreases the limits in certain circumstances. One such endorsement is the "statutory cap limits" endorsement. This endorsement reduces the limits shown on the declaration page to statutory cap limits if a claim is subject to Texas’ statutory caps on damages for governmental tort liability. This could be especially problematic when trying to settle a claim.

Finally, a consumer should carefully read the fine print. Will you be subject to an audit that could substantially raise the initial pricing? Are you getting full replacement cost coverage for all property? Is flood included on all properties, or only those not in flood prone areas? Are your adjusters and attorneys familiar with Texas laws or are they located outside of Texas?

Still Confused?

If you need help, give us a call at 512-491-2371. We were created by local governments and are here to serve.
Burleson Babies Get a Jump Start

Bringing a new bundle of joy into the world can be the most rewarding experience. It can also feel overwhelming – you suddenly have a cute baby to take care of and knowing where to start is sometimes the hardest part. The City of Burleson has created a way to help new families get a head start.

The City and Be Healthy Burleson created a program called Burleson Babies. Each family that delivers a baby at the Texas Health Huguley Fort Worth South Hospital receives a gift bag. Families that delivered at a different hospital, adopted, or had a homebirth can apply online to have a gift bag mailed to them.

The gift bag contains goodies from all over the community, including a Burleson onesie, rubber duckie toy, Chick-Fil-A plush cow and catering trays, HEB curbside pickup, and various fitness passes. The gift bag also contains important informational pamphlets about water safety prevention, child abuse prevention, and nutrition and safety education.

“I am so thankful for all of our amazing community partners that made these gift bags so special as well as Texas Health Resources for partnering with us to make this project possible,” said Lisa Poteete, City of Burleson Community Initiatives and Special Projects Manager. “I appreciate all of the postpartum nurses who will be delivering these bags throughout the year to their Burleson patients, and I look forward to working with the Be Healthy Burleson board of directors to execute this project for years to come.”

To learn more about the program, visit the website at www.behealthyburleson.com/burleson-babies.

Volunteers Participate in Tree Planting Competition

Trees and urban forestry are beneficial for cities. They can conserve energy when strategically planted near buildings, increase property values, become a natural wildlife habitat, and improve air quality. Studies are also showing that the more time people spend outside with nature, the happier and healthier they are.

When citizens in the City of Missouri City were given the opportunity to volunteer at a tree planting competition, they didn’t hesitate. Nearly 150 volunteers in Missouri City participated in the 12th Annual Tree Planting Competition in February. The event was hosted by the Houston Area Urban Forestry Council in partnership with the City of Missouri City, CenterPoint Energy, Trees for Houston, Texas A&M Forest Service, and Living Earth.

The volunteers were grouped into teams and each team was challenged with planting 100 trees. A total of 1,500 trees were planted at Buffalo Run Park during the competition.
Frisco, Texas, where you can celebrate the history of soccer at the all-new National Soccer Hall of Fame, honor the past at the Museum of the American Railroad and see the home of America's Team at The Star, the Dallas Cowboys all-new World Headquarters and practice facility. Match all of those experiences with first-class hotels, over 300 restaurants and 9 million+ square feet of shopping. Frisco is ready to introduce you to something that is totally unexpected.

Learn more today by visiting, VisitFrisco.com/GoFrisco
In a quiet corner near downtown Granbury, you will find Memorial Lane, a beautiful and solemn park dedicated to all service members. Every step it took to build Memorial Lane is testament to the heroes it honors, and the love that Granbury residents have for those who serve.

Memorial Lane began in the mind and heart of an active and engaged Granbury resident, Julia Pannell. She envisioned a park that would honor those who currently serve, those who have served, and those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice while serving their community, state, and country. This creation would be a place of quiet, respectful beauty.

The idea was to expand the existing Jim Burks Firefighters Memorial Park, through which the Moments-in-Time Hike and Bike Trail ran. This was the perfect place to start, as the Jim Burks Firefighters Memorial Park, dedicated in 2007, features a bronze statue of a lone volunteer firefighter representing the 100th year celebration of the founding of the Granbury Volunteer Fire Department and a red firetruck playground.

The plan was to add additional individual sites to the area to represent all military and law enforcement agencies; this area would be called Memorial Lane. Each site would include statues and designated areas for remembering those who had paid the ultimate sacrifice.

Pannell built her idea for the expansion, vision of the park, and intention for the project to be funded 100 percent through fundraising efforts within the community. It may sound like a lofty goal to achieve a project this large through fundraising alone, but anyone who visits Granbury on Veterans Day, Memorial Day, or Fourth of July can see that the community supports those who serve. In fact, community fundraising is how the Jim Burks Firefighters Memorial Park had been funded 10 years earlier.

Supporters of the project grew quickly to include Granbury elected officials, the county judge and commissioners, and state officials. Both Texas Senator Brian Birdwell and Texas House Representative Mike Lang expressed their support for the project and offered to help in any way possible.

With community and city council support in hand, the real work began. Pannell formed a committee that was a combination of city staff and Granbury residents who worked on the planning and fundraising efforts. Over the next 15 months, this committee held a variety of fundraisers that ranged from "just asking" to hosting large, elegant philanthropic events.

The committee raised monetary donations and was successful in finding local and area businesses willing to donate their products and services to the vision of Memorial Lane. It was a combination of efforts from the Parks and Recreation Department staff, local vendors, and volunteers who dedicated their time and skills which brought the vision to reality.

On July 1, 2017, a massive crowd turned out in the rain for the dedication of Memorial Lane, a gift to the community. Speakers at the dedication meditated on Memorial Lane’s purpose: to honor and remember all those who currently serve, have served, and will serve in the military and law enforcement agencies. Attendees stood in awe of the breathtaking result of many months of hard work.

Across a walking trail from the existing Jim Burks Firefighters Memorial site stands the base of the two new sites that form Memorial Lane. Renowned artist Mike Scovel joined Art and Ginny Blevins, who sculpted the firefighter statue from the original park, in creating the two one-of-a-kind life-sized bronze statues that enhance both the new sites.

In the law enforcement site, a statue dwells of a young girl called “Tears for the Fallen.” A single tear rolls down her cheek as she holds the American flag, a law enforcement badge, and wears a cross. “Cassidy” looks out across all the sites, remembering those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice.
The military site is enriched with a service dog who is paying homage to the Military Cross. Many days you will find small children climbing on “Brindel” the Labrador retriever while parents explain the story.

At the firefighter site, memorial benches form a new section to remember those who gave their lives while on duty.

There are also brick pavers in each of the sites carved with the names of service members. The pavers can be purchased by anyone to remember or honor someone who has served, locally or across America.

Nestled among beautiful landscaping is a large three-sectioned bronze sign that lists all donors who made the project successful. On the ground below is a stone puzzle carved with additional names of those who helped in different ways. All are combined to showcase the teamwork of the community that brought Memorial Lane to life.

Down the lane, families can still enjoy the firetruck playground area, picnic tables, and benches while also taking advantage of the opportunity to educate children on the service of those honored in Memorial Lane.

The park, with the new addition of Memorial Lane, quickly has become a favorite place for visitors and locals. Visitors to Memorial Lane find comfort for remembrance, joy in honoring, and places to sit and just reflect.

In less than a year, Memorial Lane became the setting for family gatherings, small weddings, counseling at the new pergola, and very successful events such as the July 7th Texas Fallen Law Enforcement Officer Day, 9/11 Remembrance Day, Veterans Day Card Collection Project, National Firefighters’ Day, and National Law Enforcement Day. On Memorial Day, Memorial Lane is the site of the Opening Ceremony for Memorial Day, which ends with all the attendees walking arm-in-arm to the Historic Town Square through the park amidst 100 American flags as a drum cadence is played.

With Memorial Lane complete, the volunteers formed Friends of Memorial Lane and continue to raise funds when needed, have work days to plant and pull weeds, brainstorm ideas for improvement, and work on expansions. The group continues to be self-funded by donations from the community. It is the team’s goal to always be this way.

Granbury is a place “Where Texas History Lives,” and the unique and beautiful quality of Memorial Lane makes it a place of interest and a real destination for all visitors who come to the community. Memorial Lane is destined to become a landmark to the future of Granbury. Such places fill visitors with pride, joy, sadness, and an extraordinary opportunity to be in a wonderful space.
The Texas Municipal League’s annual survey of municipal tax and debt is complete for the 2018-2019 budget year, and results are now posted on the Texas Municipal League (TML) website at www.tml.org under “Resources” and then “Surveys.” If you have difficulty accessing this information, please call the TML office at 512-231-7400.

This year, 587 cities responded to the survey (1,222 surveys were distributed). Please keep in mind that all data in this survey are self-reported, and TML cannot be responsible for errors made by the reporting entities.

The following information may be helpful when you review the survey results:

**Limitations on Municipal Tax Rates**

Municipal property tax rates are limited by the Texas Constitution (Article XI, Sections 4 and 5) and state law. Municipal tax rate ceilings are as follows:

- Cities of 5,000 or less in population (other than Type B general law cities and some Type C general law cities) can levy a maximum tax rate of $1.50 per $100 assessed valuation.
- Cities over 5,000 in population (other than Type B general law cities) can levy up to $2.50 per $100 assessed valuation. For a home rule city, a rate lower than $2.50 per $100 may be prescribed under the city charter.
- Type B general law cities can levy a maximum of $0.25 cents per $100 assessed valuation.
- Type C general law cities with a population of 201 to 501 inhabitants may levy a maximum tax rate of $0.25 per $100 assessed valuation. Other Type C general law cities may levy a maximum tax rate according to population as detailed above.

**Definitions of Terms Used in the Survey**

**General obligation bonds** are bonds that are secured by a pledge of the full faith and credit and the taxing power of the issuers. The term is synonymous with the term “tax-supported.”

**Revenue bonds** are special obligations of the issuer (as opposed to general obligations) that are payable solely from the revenues derived from an income-producing facility. Revenue bonds are sometimes further secured by a first mortgage on the physical plant or property whose revenues are pledged. Such bonds are called “first mortgage revenue bonds.”

**Certificates of obligation** are a financing mechanism a city may use to pay a contractual obligation incurred in: (1) a construction contract; (2) the purchase of materials, supplies, equipment, machinery, buildings, land, and rights-of-way for authorized needs and purposes; or (3) the payment of professional services, including services provided by tax appraisers, engineers, architects, attorneys, map makers, auditors, financial advisors, and fiscal agents.

**Tax notes** (also called “anticipation notes”) are a debt instrument that a city may sell to finance the construction of public works; to purchase supplies, land, and rights of way for public works; to pay for professional services; to pay operating expenses; or to pay off cash flow deficits. Tax notes used to pay for public works or professional services must mature before the seventh anniversary after the notes are approved by the attorney general. Tax notes used to pay operating expenses or to fund a city’s cumulative cash flow deficit must mature before the first anniversary after the notes are approved by the attorney general.

**Tax rate** is the rate at which taxes are levied per $100 of assessed valuation. In Texas, the ad valorem tax rate for local governments is expressed in terms of dollars or cents per $100 of assessed valuation.

When viewing the survey results online, the following key to municipal utilities and facilities referenced in the survey may be helpful:

**Key to Municipal Utilities and Facilities**

AM—Auditorium; AP—Airport; C—Cemetery; CE—Civic/Community Center; DR—Municipal Drainage Utility Fee; E—Electric System; FG—Fairgrounds; GC—Golf Course; GS—Gas System; H—Hospital; HR—Boat Harbor; J—Jail; L—Library/Museum; LK—Lake; M—Market; MB—Municipal Building; P—Parking Lot; PH—Public Housing Units; PK—Parks and Recreation; S—Sewer System; SC—Senior Center; SL—Solid Waste Disposal System; SP—Swimming Pool; T—Transit Bus System; TB—Toll Bridge; W—Water System; ZO—Zoo; ZZ—Other ★
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ELECTED OFFICIALS:
GET THE RECOGNITION YOU DESERVE

Service as an elected city official is a rewarding and challenging job – one that will give you tremendous satisfaction knowing that you are helping to make your city, and this great state, strong and vibrant. The Texas Municipal League (TML) and the Texas Association of Mayors, Councilmembers and Commissioners (TAMCC) encourage elected city officials to learn as much as possible about their governance roles and city government by attending a variety of educational opportunities offered throughout the year. These conferences, workshops, and webinars allow city officials to enhance their policy-making and leadership skills, and network with other city leaders from across the state.

TML and TAMCC sponsor the Texas Municipal League Institute (TMLI) to recognize elected city officials who commit to continuing their education and enhancing their service as city leaders. This voluntary certification program is open to elected city officials from TML member cities and offers levels of recognition for completing a specific number of continuing education units (CEUs) within a calendar year (January 1-December 31). One CEU is awarded for each 50 minutes of educational training.

How do I participate in TMLI?

Participation in TMLI is free and easy! Simply send a provided CEU form or agenda by mail to the TML conferences and training department or via email (tmli@tml.org). That’s it! Your CEUs will appear on the TMLI webpage after they are entered.

To view your CEUs at any time, go to www.tml.org and click on “Certification for Elected Officials” under the “Education” tab. Click on “Participants” and scroll down to your name. Your CEUs for the training year will be listed under your name.

What are the different award levels in TMLI?

TMLI offers four levels of yearly recognition, plus two special award levels for those receiving recognition on a recurring annual basis. The yearly levels of recognition include:

Certified Municipal Official – An elected official who completes 72 or more CEUs in one calendar year will obtain the designation of certified municipal official. The 72 CEUs must include two hours of open government training taken in the current award year (one hour of training on the Open Meetings Act and one hour of training on the Public Information Act). This training is required by the State of Texas, and proof of training must be provided in the manner of a certificate or other documentation.

Certificate of Outstanding Accomplishment – An elected official who completes 72 or more CEUs in one calendar year will obtain a certificate of outstanding accomplishment.

Certificate of Achievement – An elected official who completes 54 or more CEUs in one calendar year will obtain a certificate of achievement.

Certificate of Recognition – An elected official who completes 42 or more CEUs in one calendar year will obtain a certificate of recognition.

Those receiving recognition on a recurring annual basis are eligible for the following award levels:

Award of Excellence – An elected official who receives recognition in one of the above categories for five consecutive years will receive an award of excellence.

Award of Leadership – A city that has had an elected city official receive a TMLI certificate for five consecutive years will receive an award of leadership.

Where can I get more information on TMLI?

To learn more about TMLI and award levels, visit the website. For questions, contact tmli@tml.org or 512-231-7400.
Birds, Bees & Butterflies

The Beaumont Convention and Visitors Bureau is working to build partnerships to attract pollinators in the same way they've worked to draw tourists. The newly opened Cattail Marsh Wetlands Education Center teaches the importance of pollinators for the city's prime location on two migratory flyways.

Bird walks, Yoga, photography classes, and more are planned to expand on the already trending nature tourism development. Beaumont’s outdoor scene is thriving and the Convention and Visitors Bureau is building on the Eco-friendly image.

The Cattail Marsh wetland system, originated in September 1993, and allowed the City of Beaumont's water reclamation department to comply with stricter stream standard regulations. The Wetlands consists of artificial and natural existing wetlands that occupies approximately 900 acres. In addition to being a functioning utility, the Wetlands became an attractive habitat for birds and wildlife.

A Bird Watcher’s Paradise

Beaumont is a natural address for over 320 species of birds and is an international renowned bird-watching destination. The new Cattail Marsh Boardwalk and Wetlands Education Center puts nature lovers face-to-face with wildlife.
**LEGAL ★ Q&A**

By Zindia T. Thomas
TML Assistant General Counsel

**Q** May a public official or employee accept a benefit if it was offered or accepted after the exercise of official discretion?

**A** Even if a benefit was offered or accepted after the exercise of official discretion, it may still be considered bribery of a public official or employee. According to section 36.02(c) of the Penal Code, the fact that a benefit was not offered or accepted until after the exercise of some official discretion is not a defense to bribery.

**Q** What is the punishment for bribery?

**A** Accepting, agreeing to accept, or soliciting any benefit as consideration for a decision, opinion, recommendation, vote, or other exercise of official discretion is a second degree felony, punishable by two to twenty years of imprisonment and a fine of up to $10,000. Tex. Penal Code §§ 36.02(e), 12.33.

**Q** May a public official be removed from office if the public official is convicted of bribery?

**A** If a public official is convicted of bribery, then the public official is immediately removed from office. Tex. Loc. Gov’t Code § 21.031. The judge shall include an order of removal in the conviction judgment.

**Q** May a public official or employee accept a gift that is simply provided in appreciation for superior public service and that is not in exchange for any official exercise of discretion?

**A** Public officials and employees are prohibited from accepting gifts of any kind from a person subject to his/her jurisdiction, regardless of whether it is in recognition of superior service or a token of gratitude. Tex. Penal Code § 36.08. These gifts are also considered a benefit as defined above. A floral arrangement, gift basket, gift certificate, tickets to an event, or complementary/discounted services or products would constitute a gift.
**Q** What if the gift is unsolicited?

**A** Even if a gift is unsolicited, it may still be considered bribery of a public official or an employee or a gift from a person subject to his/her jurisdiction if the public official or employee accepts or agrees to accept the unsolicited gift, and the gift is considered a benefit a reasonable person would consider to have some monetary value.

**Q** What may a public official or employee do if he/she receives an unsolicited gift?

**A** A prohibited unsolicited gift may be donated to a governmental entity that has the authority to accept the gift or to a recognized tax-exempt charitable organization formed for educational, religious, or scientific purposes. Tex. Penal Code § 36.08(i).

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**Q** Are there any gifts a public official or employee may accept?

**A** There are some gifts that a public official or employee may accept. Section 36.10 of the Penal Code lists some exception to gifts to public official or employees subject to his/her jurisdiction. The exceptions include:

1. An item that has a value of less than $50 (excluding cash or a negotiable instrument);
2. A gift given by a person with whom the official or employee has a familial, personal, business, or professional relationship that is independent of the official or employee’s status or work;
3. Any benefit that the official or employee is entitled to receive by law or for which the person has performed a duty independent of the person’s status as a public servant (e.g., jury duty fee); or
4. Political contributions as defined by Title 15 of the Election Code.
Q May a public official or employee receive food and entertainment?

A A public official or employee may lawfully accept food, lodging, transportation, or entertainment as a guest – meaning that the recipient must be in the presence of the donor. Tex. Penal Code § 36.10(b); Tex. Ethics Comm’n Op. Nos. 261 (1995), 118 (1993). If the public official or employee is required by state law to report such a gift, it must be done in accordance with the law for the exception to apply. Id.

Q What is the punishment for accepting a gift from a person subject to a public official or employee’s jurisdiction?

A The acceptance by a public official or employee of a gift offered by a person under the official or employee’s jurisdiction is a Class A misdemeanor punishable by a fine of up to $4,000 and/or jail time of up to one year. Tex. Penal Code §§ 36.08(h), 12.21.

Q May a public official or employee accept a small gift or payment for speaking at an event because of his/her official position?

A A public official or employee may not solicit, accept, or agree to accept a gift or payment, known as an honorarium, in return for services that would not have been requested but for the public servant’s official position or duties. Id. § 36.07(a). Although the Penal Code does not define “honorarium,” numerous ethics opinions can provide some guidance. For instance, the Texas Ethics Commission has noted that an “honorarium” is commonly understood to be “a payment in recognition of acts or professional services for which custom or propriety forbids a price to be set.” Tex. Ethics Comm’n Op. No. 401 (1998). Also, the Texas Ethics Commission has determined that fees for speaking, teaching, and certain other services are included in the term “honorarium”. Tex. Ethics Comm’n Op. Nos. 305 (1996), 294 (1995). A public official or employee may accept meals, transportation and lodging expenses connected with a speaking engagement at a conference or similar event to the extent that the involvement in the event is more than merely perfunctory. Tex. Penal Code § 36.07(b)

Q What may a public official or employee do if he/she receives an unsolicited honorarium?


Q What is the punishment for a public official or employee who accepts an honorarium?

A The acceptance of an honorarium by a public official or employee is a Class A misdemeanor punishable by a fine of up to $4000 and/or jail time of up to one year. Tex. Penal Code §§ 36.07(c), 12.21.

Q Are public officials or employees prohibited from using government property for personal purposes?

A State law prohibits public officials or employees from misusing government property, services, personnel, or any other thing of value belonging to the government with the intent to obtain a benefit or to harm or defraud another. Id. §39.02(a)(2). “Misuse” is defined as dealing with property in a way that is contrary to:

1) An agreement under which the public servant holds the property;
2) A contract of employment or oath of office of a public servant;
3) A law that prescribes the manner of custody or disposition of the property; or
4) A limited purpose for which the property is delivered. Id. § 39.01(2)(A)-(D).

Q What is the punishment for misuse of government property?

A The punishment for misuse of government property ranges from a Class C misdemeanor to a first degree felony, depending on the value of the misused property. Id. § 39.02(c).
Q May a public official be removed from office if the public official is convicted of accepting an illegal gift or honorarium, or misusing government property?

A There is no special remedy under the Penal Code providing for the removal of a public official due to a conviction for accepting an illegal gift or honorarium, or misusing government property. However, if a public official is criminally convicted of such an offense, it may affect his or her eligibility for office. Additionally, such a conviction may act to automatically remove the public official from office or be grounds for removal from office through a recall or other removal action if such is authorized under state law or a city charter. Tex. Loc. Gov’t Code §§ 21.025, 21.031.

Q Are public officials or employees prohibited from using official information to gain a benefit or an advantage?

A Public officials or employees are prohibited from disclosing information to which the public officials or employees have access by virtue of their office or employment and that has not been made public with intent 1) to gain a benefit or advantage, or 2) to harm or defraud another. Tex. Penal Code § 39.06. "Information that has not been made public" means any information to which the public does not generally have access to and that is prohibited from disclosure under the Public Information Act. Id. § 39.06(d).

Q What is the punishment for misuse of official information?

A Generally, the punishment for misuse of official information is a third degree felony punishable by two to ten years of imprisonment and a fine not to exceed $10,000. Tex. Penal Code §§ 39.06(e), 12.34.

Q Can a public official be removed from office for a violation of the misuse of official information?

A Generally, if a public official is convicted for misuse of official information, the public official is immediately removed from office. Tex. Loc. Gov’t Code § 21.031. The judge shall include an order of removal in the conviction judgment.

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Many know the Hill Country River Region – which includes the cities of Concan, Utopia, Sabinal, and Uvalde – for its three crystal-clear rivers, rolling hills, and the ever-popular Garner State Park. To continue to help Texans unwind in the region's secluded beauty and bring these destinations' attractions to a national audience, Texas Hill Country River Region promotes year-round tourism to each of these incredible cities. Through these efforts, we’ve been able to reach more than 542 million since 2016 through positive media attention from the Travel Channel, Southern Living, and most recently Reader's Digest, which named the City of Concan a top under-the-radar place to visit in 2019. Above all, these efforts have supported real economic growth in each of these cities, driving visitors to explore the treehouse dining in the City of Utopia, rent a cabin and float the river in the City of Sabinal, or watch 10 million bats take flight into the Concan night sky.
Direct visitor spending reached $83 million in 2017 – an increase of more than $8 million from 2016 and a 23 percent increase since 2010 – helping support nearly 800 jobs directly tied to the tourism industry.* The Frio, Sabinal, and Nueces Rivers are among the most popular reasons to visit any of the cities in the area, drawing more than 20,000 people to Concan each weekend in the summer. With plenty of access to inner-tube, kayak, and canoe rentals, along with ample fishing opportunities, spending a day on the water is the perfect way to enjoy the Frio River in Concan, the Sabinal River in Sabinal, or the Nueces River in Uvalde. The rivers wind through areas like Garner State Park and Chalk Bluff Park, offering incredible views of the chalk cliffs and rolling hills – and even the largest tree in Texas.

To combat the environmental impact of this influx of visitors, we established the "Don't Trash Where You Splash" river cleanup program in 2016, drawing from our own funding, which comes from the county’s Hotel Occupancy tax. In partnership with Keep Texas Beautiful, Keep Utopia Beautiful, and Friends of the Frio, the fourth season of the program is in full swing, donating $10 per person in volunteer groups of six or more for each hour they spend cleaning up the river to a charity of their choice. Since the program’s inception, over 300 volunteers have collected more than 5,000 pounds of trash from the rivers, donating nearly $15,000 to local and regional nonprofits. The rise of "voluntourism," a form of tourism in which people travel specifically to participate in voluntary work, has provided an additional benefit of the program, attracting visitors and tourists in its own right. Notably, Sisters on the Fly, the largest women’s organization in the United States focused on outdoor recreation, recently came to Concan to participate in the program and camp in Garner State Park.

Cleanups take place on Sundays and Tuesdays throughout the summer with flexible shifts ranging from two to eight hours. Volunteers are offered discounted rates on lodging at attractions like Frio Country Resort and Neal’s Lodges, giving them the chance to explore Concan’s hiking, dining, hunting, and shopping. For additional information, visit VisitUvaldeCounty.com/p/rivers/311. Those unable to coordinate a scheduled cleanup are still able to get involved and keep the rivers beautiful by disposing of waste in the widely available trash bags at the Visitor’s Center and most businesses in Concan.

Texas Hill Country River Region continues to reach new heights on behalf of the cities of Concan, Utopia, Uvalde, and Sabinal, generating revenue, positive environmental impact, sustainable growth for tourism and connected industries, and an invaluable awareness of the unique travel opportunities available in these cities. I hope you’ll come by soon for a visit to see our success in action.

*Source: Economic Impact Report for Texas Tourism, Office of Governor, Economic Development and Tourism ★
NATURE-BASED TOURISM

USING MOTHER NATURE TO CREATE ECONOMIC IMPACT

By Holli Conley TDM, CTE
Vice President of Marketing, Visit Tyler
Texas has one of the most diverse landscapes and more natural beauty than any state in the nation. Over the past few years, nature tourism has become very popular as more and more studies come out about the physical and psychological benefits of being in nature.

According to a recent study, most of us are spending half as much time outside as compared to only 20 years ago. The study claims that outside activities such as gardening or hiking is good for the mind, body, and soul. The research shows that being outside clears your head, makes you more creative, boosts your focus, and recharges your mind’s battery. Scientists have proven that people who spend time outside are healthier, sleep better, and have more energy.

That’s why nature tourism is on the rise. The City of Tyler is a great example of a city capitalizing on a natural attraction to create an economic impact for the community. If there’s one thing the City is known for, it’s for the area’s beauty. Nestled serenely in the piney woods of east Texas, the area offers some pretty great landscapes for the outdoorsy types.

While Tyler is mostly known for its roses, in the spring, roses take a back seat to azaleas. An annual favorite is the Azalea and Spring Flower Trail, which takes place at the end of March and beginning of April. The Azalea and Spring Trail will celebrate its 60th year this year and features mile after mile of blooming azaleas, dogwoods, and spring flowers. This event has been described as a floral wonderland and a gardener’s and photographer’s paradise.

If you have traveled to Tyler, it’s hard to miss these spring-time blooms as you travel around town, but many don’t know how Tyler became known as “a natural beauty.” It didn’t just happen overnight.

While oil booms gave Tyler an economic head start in the 1930’s, pine trees, azaleas, and roses gave the City its beauty. Azaleas were introduced to Tyler in 1929 by Maurice Shamburger, one of the city’s early nurserymen. Pleased with results of a test garden of azaleas, Shamburger shipped the colorful plants to Tyler by the boxcar loads from the State of Georgia.
After completing his garden in 1929, Shamburger discussed the beautification potential of azaleas with Mrs. Sara Butler of the *Tyler Courier Times Telegraph*. Mrs. Butler not only encouraged Shamburger to promote azalea plantings in the City, but she personally supported the effort by planting a number of bushes at her own home.

That home site, along with several other gardens, soon became springtime showplaces with their colorful azalea blooms, and Tylerites began buying the plants by the thousands. Some of the thick, towering azaleas at older homes on the Trail date back to the ‘30’s and ‘40’s.

By 1960, the blooming azaleas were attracting much attention, and that year the Chamber of Commerce established a marked route. The first Trail featured about 60 homes on a five-mile route.

The Trail was an instant success. Within two years it had expanded to 75 homes and was attracting 15,000 visitors. By 1964, 25,000 people a year were coming to see the azaleas. In 1986, the Trail expanded to two miles.

With the success of the Trail escalating and more tourists coming to town, the Chamber of Commerce decided guests needed to be welcomed in true southern style. In 1964, the first Azalea Belles wearing full antebellum dresses were introduced to the Azalea and Spring Flower Trail. These ladies distributed brochures and greeted guests along the Trail, solidifying the event as a true tourist attraction.

Today, the Azalea and Spring Flower Trail consists of two trails that wind through ten miles of historic homes and gardens bursting with the colors of spring. During this time of year, Tyler hosts city-wide events including historic home tours, live entertainment, arts and crafts fairs, a flower market, and more. Last year, about 70,000 people visited the event creating an estimated economic impact of almost two million dollars for the community.

In addition to the economic impact, there are many other benefits of establishing your community as a nature tourism destination. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department states that other benefits include helping to promote habitat conservation and sustainable economic development along with building broad-based support for wildlife conservation programs.

The best part about nature tourism is that, in most cases, those assets already exist. Destinations that have good infrastructure for nature tourism are already seeing an increase in tourist traffic. With a little bit of effort and strategic planning, destinations can easily develop nature tourism in a sustainable way that will have a positive impact on the community and tourists alike.

If you’re looking for a new way to attract visitors, step outside, take a deep breath, and look around you. You might be able to capitalize on an existing asset in a new and different way that you haven’t thought of before. ★
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Sometimes working in a city’s tourism department can feel like you’re actually working on a different planet from the other municipal departments. After all, on the surface, neighborhood water main repairs and hotel night stays don’t really have that much to do with each other.

Of course, in the bigger picture, there is an undeniable link between tourism and the overall growth of a city.

"Potential business owners are first introduced to places as visitors or tourists," said Theresa Cohagen, Director of the Mansfield Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB). "Having positive recreational experiences can influence both business and talent recruitment."

In the City of Mansfield, this link is most prominently seen between the City’s CVB and Parks and Recreation department — two sectors with very different mission statements, but a wealth of overlap to mine.

Mansfield Parks and Recreation oversees nearly one dozen parks, including the well-renowned Elmer W. Oliver Nature Park, and helps operate many of the City’s athletic facilities.

A large portion of the big events the CVB recruits utilize a parks’ facility.

Parks and Recreation hosts special events, too. While primarily focused on education and entertainment for local residents, these activities help round out a trip to Mansfield and offer something to do during the off hours of a sports tournament, conference, or other trip. Because of this, the CVB heavily promotes these special events in monthly blog posts, email blasts, and event flyers that go to every hotel.

"The CVB benefits by having the knowledge and resources
that Parks and Recreation provides and the department benefits from the added marketing and promotional push from the CVB,” Cohagen said.

The collaboration goes beyond just athletics and nature tourism, though. Both teams work to plan large events like Music Alley and an annual music and arts festival which would be too big for any one department to plan alone.

So how do you build a tight bond between different departments? Here are three general tips to follow:

1. Communicate constantly. Stay up to date on what every department has going on, and keep them apprised of big events you have coming up that could enter their waters.

2. Find out how to help. For example, if public works is hosting a conference on road repair, make sure every out of town guest has a welcome bag and info about the city.

3. Engage the citizens through the city’s departments. As a CVB, your first customer is your tourist, but never neglect your residents. They are the best marketers you could hire.

“Having citizens as strong advocates helps the CVB because local ambassadors are a great resource to use in promoting a destination,” Cohagen added.

The cycle never ends when you engage in strong inter-departmental relationships. As a CVB, your best ally may change from city to city: parks, fire, police, public works, the library, and others. Communicate, help, and engage and it will all contribute to the overall positive narrative you want to tell about your city to residents and visitors. ★
Texas is full of amazing destination jewels and diamonds in the rough. So, how do you get the word out? How do you get the media’s attention, thereby attracting visitors? It’s tougher than ever! You must rise above the noise in today’s world and showcase the best you have to offer. Here are three tips to help you “up” your public relations game this year.

Prepare Your Public Relations Plan

First and foremost, you need to design a strategy that includes all of the steps needed to get media outlets writing about your destination, which in turn, will hopefully bring visitors. How modern and comprehensive are your assets? Is your website easy to navigate, contemporary, and compelling? Do your images invoke nostalgia or a desire to get away to experience all that your town has to offer? Are your social media platforms current, interesting, and engaging for fans and followers?
There is so much to consider around your branding, your press materials, your audience, and how you're presenting your city. Pay attention to all of these and put your best foot forward. Develop an eight-to-12 month approach that is both attainable and stretches to reach a new audience. Don’t forget great video!

**Get Their Attention**

One of my most favorite projects was when I was asked by my hometown’s Convention and Visitors Bureau to write an advertorial for TexasMonthly.com that ended up going viral. It pulled together many of my favorite things: a town that still holds my heart, my travel journalism skills, and knowing just what to say to promote this gem. You need to capture that same lightning in a bottle to get travel media to see your destination for themselves.

Here are a few ways to find these travel writers: use a database to hone in on your ideal media outlets; Google sleuth and find travel stories you like around the state and search out those writers; and ask around. I’m always happy to connect destinations with some of my favorite travel writers whom I’ve met on other press trips.

Once you find them, make sure you email them to tell them why your particular town is a good fit for their audience. Keep your pitch concise but outline what makes your city unique. Do you have a funky statue in town that’s perfect for Instagram? Does one of your local restaurants make the best scratch-made biscuits around? Why do visitors find your place particularly relaxing or exciting?

**Show Your Jewels**

I’ve recently gotten hooked on the Netflix reality show out of Australia, Instant Hotel, where Airbnb hosts compete to wow their fellow hosts with their accommodations and pull out all the stops. What you can learn from this series is how to put your best foot forward and impress media outlets with the little details.

Design an itinerary for their visit that will put them in your favorite property in town; eating meals at the most interesting and unique restaurants; experiencing craft breweries, local wines, or signature cocktails; and let them experience activities that they can share with their audience. The best FAM (familiarization) visit includes a blend of curated experiences but a dose of down time, too. Most journalists have ongoing deadlines and work to get done even while they are traveling, so some time blocks built into the visit’s schedule will be appreciated.★
CREATE COMMUNITY
ADVOCATES THROUGH EDUCATION

By Shane Sorenson

Every year destination marketing organizations (DMOs) around the country are tasked with proving their value and relevance to their tourism industry partners, their community, and city leaders. This may be done internally with a board or city management, or externally by reports to city council or published elsewhere.

The tourism world is highly competitive with more and more cities seeking to diversify their tax base, expand and support their local job market, and fill convention centers built by those from a previous era. Destination marketers and convention sales professionals are continually following trends, adapting to market changes, and seeking new and engaging ways to attract this outside business to their community. Countless hours are spent developing interactive and engaging ways to convey the message of destinations that will entice a weekend getaway from that retired “boomer” couple who lives the next state over, or to show a meeting planner that their next conference of 1,500 people will have enough dining and lodging options to meet the needs of the group, but also able to provide a unique experience that will make the conference memorable and encourage attendees to come back for a leisure trip with their families.

Successful DMOs work collaboratively with community leaders and other partners to ensure they are positively perceived and valued. This all starts with transparency and inclusion on the part of the DMO. Whether a DMO is member or non-member based, relationships in the community go far beyond attractions, hotels, and restaurants. Those relationships must extend to media, small business owners, schools and colleges, and just about everyone else. If DMOs broaden their circle of communication and education on the value and relevance of tourism, as well as share their marketing plans, partnership agreements, and other organizational tactics, it is possible to create educated advocates within the community.

A great example of this is Fort Worth Convention and Visitors Bureau’s Annual Meeting where they present how many visitors were attracted and how many hotel room nights were generated in the previous year, what new marketing tools are being utilized, and also provides a keynote speaker who can help educate those in attendance on the industry trends and how a destination can more effectively market themselves. What if every community did something like this? What if there were a community engagement
newsletter that locals could sign up for to stay in the know with how their community is being represented to visitors and told real stories that conveyed why tourism is important to the local residents, whether they work in the tourism industry or not.

I recently read of a newer DMO whose board voted to not have open meetings where the public was invited. My question is, “Why?” Why would an organization give the impression that they are hiding something? Perhaps they don’t want to face the public who may not agree with their plans or budget expenditures, but I would propose that if they took the time to open the doors to the few outspoken members of the public and city council, then they would likely have advocates who are passionately supportive of them. It’s not easy for an organization of any size to make the time to educate community leaders and stakeholders, but it is worth it.

I would propose that DMOs invite board, council members, and other community leaders to attend tradeshows, conferences, and events alongside staff to promote their destinations. Certainly, a mayor, councilmember, or board member would have a unique perspective on why their community is a great place to visit. Perhaps passionate residents could be invited to informal focus-groups for marketing plans to make sure that the community is being represented accurately and effectively. It may even be worth considering creating a public affairs position within the organization whose primary focus is local advocacy and building community partnerships. Community leaders should be just as passionate about tourism as they are about wastewater treatment, recreation, and those pesky pot holes in the road because without tourism it may be hard to scrounge up the budget to fix those pot holes.

There is no quick and easy approach that fits all communities, but there are steps that can be taken to educate and inform city leaders, community activists, and passionate residents who only want the best for their hometown. Through transparency and education, local leaders will be better informed of the value of destination marketing to the community and appreciate the real work of those who are giving their time, talent, and energy to promote their city, support local jobs, and put food on their neighbor’s table. Every year, DMOs are tasked with proving their value and relevance to a community, and from what I’ve experienced, they are doing a pretty bang up job.

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Preserving History and Promoting Tourism with the Texas Heritage Trails

Just off the beaten path, down winding farm-to-market roads and along state highways, the stories of Texas can be witnessed and explored. For 50 years, travelers have been experiencing the State’s rich history, culture, and heritage from the Texas Travel Trails. Today, those driving trails have become much more than iconic blue and white signs; they’ve become the Texas Heritage Trails Program.

In 1967, Governor John Connally announced the Texas tourism initiative known then as the Texas Travel Trails, based around ten scenic driving trails, each complete with a guide book, designed to help Texans and out-of-state visitors discover the less known recreational, scenic, historical, and cultural sites. He said that the trails would “bring new economic hope to the door-step of small towns and out-of-the-way points all over Texas.” In 1968, at the world’s first HemisFair in San Antonio, the Texas Travel Trails were introduced to the world. Little did Connally know, his driving trails would grow into ten regions that support all 254 Texas counties.
Each region still has its own original driving trail, but today the program has grown to become ten regions of preservationists, tourism and marketing professionals, and educators working to promote Texas for present and future generations. The Heritage Trails Program is the only such program that supports every county in Texas. The stories of Texas, its rich culture, timeless heritage, heroes, and legends are being told and preserved by the Texas Heritage Trails, a program of the Texas Historic Commission.

From ancient burial mounds and underground caverns, to missions, forts, and battlefields, from brick streets and the blues, to cowboy hats and boots, the Texas Heritage Trail Regions are everything Texas, with insider information to help you see and do more. Each region has its own diverse trove of Texas treasures and historic gems, and its own regional expert to assist Texans and travelers in their quest to have the ultimate Lone Star experience. Weekend warriors, road trippers, and out-of-state guests may veer off the original scenic driving trail, but they are never far from a Texas bucket list item, and the keys to each region are readily available for access online via Heritage Trail websites and their social media. Whether travelers long for sandy beaches or mountain views, or hiking through pine forests and ancient canyons, or foodie adventures and downtown experiences, the Heritage Trails are the authority on the real places and real stories of Texas.

The Heritage Trails Program also plays a role as keepers of Texas history and actively works to preserve it, as well as educate those seeking to learn from the past. Heritage regions offer their resources to historic sites as well as historic foundations and commissions. For instance, in 2016, the Texas Forest Trail Region assisted Caddo Mounds State Historic Site with the promotion and construction of an authentic Caddo grass house. The grass house attraction attracts visitors to the site, and is a tool to teach guests about ancient Texas history through a hands-on experience that will be long remembered, and the traveler experience echoes far and wide.

When Governor Connally rolled out the Texas Travel Trails, he noted that the State could help get travelers here, but then it would be the responsibility of each community to
keep them there through hospitality. While the Heritage Trails have been welcoming travelers for 50 years, it’s a well-known fact that Texas has been welcoming newcomers for thousands of years from Spanish expeditions to pioneers. Texas takes its name from the Caddo word “Tejas,” meaning friend, and Texans continue their long-running record of welcoming travelers.

Texas hospitality is always on tap, making tourism an economic force to be reckoned with. Heritage tourism, specifically, is big business in Texas. In 2017, 10.5 percent of all travel to Texas was heritage related, and generated 7.3 billion in travel spending. For every single dollar that Texas spends, heritage tourism returns eight dollars to the State. The impact that heritage tourism has on the State preserves history, creates jobs, stimulates growth, revitalizes communities, attracts tourists, and makes money. Heritage tourism influence has proven to be vital to Texas.

This year marks the Golden Anniversary of the Texas Heritage Trails Program, and in light of the 2017 funding victory with the Texas legislative session, the 50-year-old tourism initiative is thriving as it leads heritage tourists to and through Texas, and preserves Texas history, heritage, and culture.

Half a century of heritage tourism in Texas calls for a celebration! This year, some of the trails are celebrating with a throwback to their inaugural year with a caravan, beginning with the Texas Mountain Trail Region’s Golden Anniversary Caravan in late-March. Other trails will celebrate with promotions and giveaways, along with the Texas Historic Commission’s year-long travel sweepstakes program which began in early March in the Texas Independence Trail Region.

Learn more about the Texas Heritage Trails Program and each unique region by visiting the Texas Heritage Trails website at www.texasheritagetrails.com, then selecting a region and planning your next trip. Whether you’re looking for a historic adventure, outdoor fun, bluebonnet fields, or Tex-Mex, the regions are available to assist you. You can also find each trail on Facebook. Take advantage of the Heritage Trails Program and their hospitality.
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The City of Mesquite has made strong steps in strategic planning, destination brand development, and destination and community partnership development. This is already proving to be successful in focusing the Mesquite Convention and Visitors Bureau’s (CVB) work and ensuring relevance in the ever-changing digital landscape of travel trends.

**We created a vision for the CVB:** An increasingly more attractive and growing Mesquite tourism market fueled by economic growth from visitor spending as a result of strong City department partnerships and collaboration within the hospitality community.

This is aspirational and stretching. The vision speaks to where we hope to be in the future, and our plan supports this vision.

**We established our mission:** Inspire travel to Mesquite and foster authentic experiences resulting in vocal advocates for Mesquite through new technologies and key trend insights in bringing the targeted visitor to Mesquite.

**We identified our brand pillars:** Authentically Texas, legendary rodeo and history, vibrant performing arts and City events, ethnically diverse welcoming community, active lifestyle and outdoor fun with dining and entertainment, and the Dallas suburbs with affordable, quality hotels and convention center.

Creating the brand pillars as part of our overall brand building required significant planning and work. Over six months, we held focus groups that included hospitality partners (hotel, attraction, and restaurant owners) as well as staff from Historic Mesquite, Mesquite Arts Center, Downtown Mesquite, and the City of Mesquite. Through this process, we developed a new brand logo which was approved by the City, making us the first department in Mesquite’s history to be allowed a brand and logo separate from the City’s. We will also be the first department to have an independent website.

**We determined our key objectives:** Integrate tourism initiatives and tactics to include tourism; sales (large and small groups); Mesquite Metro Airport; Historic Mesquite; Mesquite Golf Course; Mesquite Arts Center; sports marketing; social, military, educational, religious, and fraternal audiences; Downtown Mesquite; Mesquite Convention Center; and hospitality partners.

Engagement is increasing dramatically as a result of the CVB’s leadership in creating these collaborations and partnerships.

Recognizing that 33 percent of visitors come to Mesquite to see friends and family, the CVB is creating new campaigns to engage residents as brand ambassadors. We are increasing collaboration through new technologies like the website and app, and getting creative through marketing strategies with FAM (familiarization) trips for bloggers and influencers and weekly evergreen stories pushed to subscribers across all platforms.

Strategy has played a huge roll in this rebrand. We are proactive in planning our messages, campaigns, and activities, and have established metrics that keep us accountable and focused on our goals. This measured approach is resulting in stronger relationships with hospitality partners and other city departments. And most importantly, it is delivering on the experiential promise communicated to Mesquite tourists through various platforms.

With a small budget and staff, our vendors and hospitality partners have become an extension of the CVB family. Visitors are benefitting from these efforts, and citizens have greater pride in their Mesquite community.★
Hit Us Up!

What are the big things on your city’s calendar?
What out of town events are you hosting?
What are your city’s top attractions?
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Partner with us! TOGETHER we can all work to bring more tourism to Texas and make the experience an UNFORGETTABLE one!
Your city is doing great things and you want to show them off for all to see, but you don’t have a professional photographer on staff. It’s okay! Believe it or not, you don’t need a big fancy camera to take professional looking photos. Just follow these tips.

1. Find the light.
Photography is more about light than anything else; natural light is the number one key to beautiful photographs. So get you and your subject in a well-lit natural light area. If you’re photographing a building or landscape, the best time to photograph them is sunrise or sunset. Try to avoid high noon; and if you can, get the light behind you and shining on your subject.

2. Follow the rule of thirds.
Mentally divide your view into thirds, horizontally and vertically. Then, put your important subjects along those lines. For a visual, you can actually turn these gridlines on:

- iPhone: Settings -> Camera -> Grid (toggle on)
- Android: Open camera app -> Settings -> Gridlines
- Google Phone: Open camera app -> Menu -> Settings -> Grid (toggle on)

3. Set the focus.
When you have your camera app open, point it at your subject. Once you have the light and rule of thirds in order, gently tap your screen on your subject. You’ve just set the focus. Need to readjust? Just frame your photo and tap again. You might notice your screen getting slightly brighter or darker – that means the focus is working and your smartphone is doing the technical stuff behind the scenes.

4. Say “no” to zoom.
I know it can be tempting, but don’t use your zoom. While camera phones have come a long way over the years, they still aren’t that great with zoom. Just get a little closer to your subject. Your photo will be crisper that way.

5. Keep it steady.
Hold your phone with both hands, or better yet, get a little tripod. If you still get a little camera shake, take a few photos in a row and use one of the middle photos with less movement in the image.★
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Who’s got spring fever? Plan your trip to #ConroeTX and take advantage of the many outdoor activities the area has to offer. The Sam Houston National Forest is a must-see when you #VisitConroe. The 160,000-acre property includes the “Jewel of Texas” — the Lone Star Hiking Trail. Don’t be surprised if you spot a variety of wildlife on your hike!

@visitcleburne
Need weekend plans? Explore Cleburne State Park — enjoy scenic views and fresh air! Photo by @s.devildenebro

@visitlubbock
There is a hidden treasure of artistry around every corner in the 806.
"The Risk Pool really is an extension of our organization. It provides the very stable and economic source of risk financing and loss-prevention services that are critical to our core operations. In the event that something catastrophic happens, the Risk Pool is there. This partnership goes hand-in-hand where members of the community, city and local government make up the policy formulation and set the premiums. As City Manager, I see the tremendous value that the board provides, and the benefits that echo in the community that I live, work and play.”

PETER VARGAS
CITY MANAGER OF ALLEN, TEXAS
TML RISK POOL BOARD TRUSTEE

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