



Main Street Matters!

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF THE TEXAS MAIN STREET PROGRAM

MAY 2016 • COMMUNITY HERITAGE DEVELOPMENT DIVISION • P. O. BOX 12276, AUSTIN, TX 78711 • 512.463.6092

SPOTLIGHT ON EAGLE PASS

Written by Joe Cruz, Main Street Manager, Eagle Pass Main Street Program, Population approx. 26,248

Downtown Eagle Pass is moving into an era of restored storefronts, new restaurants, art galleries, and coffee shops with live entertainment, and at the same time, overcoming certain economic challenges.

Eagle Pass is known as “The First American Settlement on the Rio Grande,” dating to 1849. The city reentered the Texas Main Street Program in 2010, and was originally certified in 1981. Initially, we experienced a slow start, but over the last few years, we have seen a significant growth within our program. Our façade restoration grant has been a favorite with over 30 projects completed, and we count on a community of volunteers ranging from local business owners, to local artists, to the all-out believers in our downtown.

New Businesses – Restaurants, Cafés, Etc.



Eagle Pass Main Street Manager Joe Cruz reads out the rules to the contestants. Among the participants was Mayor Cantu, who is one of our program’s biggest supporter.

Our community is responding well to the new venues in our downtown. It took a few local entrepreneurs to create such a movement. I truly believe that the most creative small business owners are usually in downtowns.

In Eagle Pass, among these businesses you’ll find are Mia’s Restaurant, The Downtown Cupcake Shoppe, Casa di Sol Café, and the Victorian House, just to name a few. Some of these locations have decided to add a twist to their daily menu in order to attract more customers to the downtown area.

One example is Mia’s Restaurant, which was a Main Street façade grant project. Mia’s has helped



Richard Fletcher, winner of the 1st Annual Burrito Eating Contest. He plans to defend his title this coming year.

revitalize a certain block in our downtown. This restaurant attracts many employees that work in the downtown area, and it is known for the “Mia’s Giant Burrito.” In 2015, Mia’s partnered with the Main Street Program to have the 1st Annual Giant Burrito Eating Contest. The burrito weighs more than two pounds and is about two feet long. This event is one that will definitely stick!

Another unique business downtown is Casa di Sol Café. Casa di Sol opened in December 2015 and has become a hang-out for many locals. Casa di Sol offers grilled sandwiches, pizza, and coffees of all sorts, accompanied with live entertainment. The activity has added much value to this business, and the unique idea attracts many customers that are looking for more than an ordinary diner.

Live Music & Entertainment

Although live music has always existed in the downtown area, it has been taken place at Shelby Park near the Vega River. Now we are seeing a new breed of talent happening in the heart of downtown. Some of the downtown businesses are learning how to capitalize on local talent. The Main Street Program highly supports this type of movement, since the benefits of carrying such a venue is tremendous. Local performers such as the Velvet Hues, El Basi, and Carlos de La Cerda are becoming more and more popular.

Economic Challenges

Our community is currently facing two economic obstacles. The one affecting both downtown and the



(Top left) A typical Friday evening at Casa di Sol Café, where many locals come to enjoy Famous Frank’s Pizza. Frank’s Pizza was introduced to Eagle Pass by Frank Ravenna, a Chicago native, back in the 1960s. (Top right) Casa di Sol hosted a program titled “An Evening with Jerry Rhodes.” In this event, Jerry Rhodes, a local historian and downtown business owner, spoke about our town’s history. (Bottom left) Local singer Carlos de la Cerda performing at Casa di Sol Café. (Bottom right) On Saturdays, owner of Casa di Sol Café, Carmen Ravenna, offers cooking lessons for children.



(Top left) The Velvet Hues performing at Casa di Sol Café. The Velvet Hues are a contemporary pop/rock band. The event sold out, and they have plans to continue performing in Eagle Pass. (Top right) “El Basi,” a local punk rock artist, performing at the Downtown Cupcake Shoppe’s second location. (Bottom left) Latino music is still the most sought out in our community. When it comes to local music, Eagle Pass has different styles of Latino music to choose from. (Bottom right) “El Gran Sabor,” a local Latino music band, performing at downtown’s Shelby Park during the Friendship Festival, which is a big celebration during the month of March.

rest of the retail community is the plunging price of the Mexican currency (the peso) versus the U.S. dollar.

In order to provide aid to the commerce in downtown, the Main Street Program is creating a series of commercials that will focus on attracting locals. We understand the current situation in Mexico, and for the meantime, we know that it is hard for Mexican nationals to spend the same amount of money they were two years ago. In the month of March, we did see an increase of sales in the downtown area. We hope to see some stability in the exchange rate soon.



The buy and sell price is displayed on a window at a bank in Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico.

The Art Movement in Downtown

In 2015, we decided to work along with some of our local artists to start the process of an art program for our downtown. From some of our research, we knew that it was necessary to encourage the development of our local artists, and at the same time, attract more visitors to our downtown.

By starting on such a project, we found that not only does having an art program help attract more visitors to our downtown, but it also creates a sense of community pride. This year, Jose Landa, local artist, decided to create our first



(Top left) Jose Landa and Alejandro Barajas work on the mural's details. The mural is of a postcard of Main Street in 1939. (Top right) Artists that put this project together: From L-R, David Diaz, Luisa Stearns, Adrian Ordaz, and in the background, Marcos Mares. (Middle right) Typical turn-out at most of our art shows. Usual attendance on a premiere is usually over 200 attendees. (Bottom) Local artist Gerardo Lopez entertains visitors at the art gallery building on Main Street.

mural for downtown with the aid and help of Alejandro Barajas, an internationally known muralist. We have plans to have two other murals completed by the end of the year. Much of this support comes from

a man by the name of Joaquin Davila, who allows us to use part of his building to hold art shows downtown. The building was vacant and in need of some TLC. With the help of our artists, we

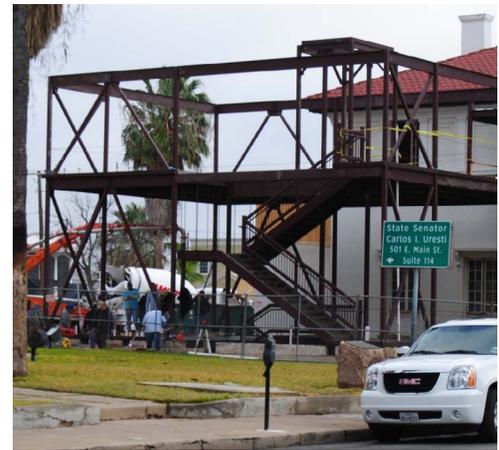
were able to convert the inside into a presentable art gallery. We have two art shows coming up in June and July.

It's amazing what things can happen when a group of people come together with a similar vision but a diversified concept. It takes courage, support, and creativity to take a vacant building and turn it into an art gallery. It makes me proud to see that we have individuals in our community with such clever ideas. Much of this wouldn't be possible if it wasn't for the support we get from our mayor, council, and many of our local businesses.

Our Preservation Efforts

Of course we couldn't leave preservation out of our program. Recently, preservation awareness has grown in our community thanks to the volunteers that have worked hard to promote our town's history. Jeff Taylor Sr., who is now our museum curator, kicked it off with his Eagle Pass, Texas "Back in the Day" events. Jeff's product took historic preservation to another level. We have many other volunteers to thank. These groups of individuals feel that their time and dedication is always well spent because of the awareness our program creates.

On another historic preservation note, we continue providing aid to many of our downtown buildings through our façade grant program. A downtown cannot function well if the stores do not have good appeal. The city also took on a \$3.4 million project with the restoration of the public library building. We continue working with this grant with our downtown business owners, and as I have stated before, we are improving the look of



(Top left) Jeff Taylor with Justin Horne from KSAT -12 News, San Antonio. Justin Horne worked on a story about the history of Eagle Pass; it aired in March 2016. (Top right) L-R Main Street Manager Joe Cruz, Aide Castano, Mayor Cantu, and Ruth Calderon. Aide and Ruth are big supporters of our program and often volunteer their time for our events. (Middle left) One of our most recent façade grant projects, The Victorian House. The Victorian House was built around 1877 by Trinidad San Miguel, a prominent businessman from Eagle Pass. (Middle right) The Victorian House offers a mixed venue of weddings, reunions, and live music events. (Bottom left) Restoration work inside the public library building. This building was built in 1909 and was originally the U.S. Post office and Customs building. (Bottom right) The public library will now have an elevator that will allow public access to the upstairs and basement. Total investment is \$3.4 million.

downtown one building at a time.

There are many challenges that downtowns have to face, but at the same time there is much that can be done to overcome these challenges by combining the efforts of both the private and public sector. Recently our Main

Street Advisory Board considered increasing the match and possibly adding some other stimulus to the program. The Eagle Pass City Council and mayor highly support and believe in our program. In order to have a successful Main Street program, it is very important to have the support from your local

governmental body. Our program wouldn't be what it is without all the help we receive from our community, local businesses, and many of our city employees and friends. They are also big role players within our program's success.

A PORTFOLIO APPROACH TO MEASURING DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION

Article written by Brian O' Connor, Economic Development Specialist, Texas Main Street Program / Town Square Initiative

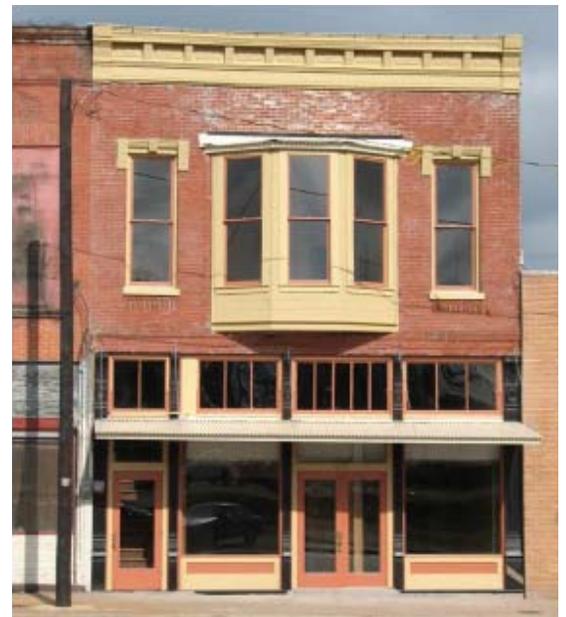
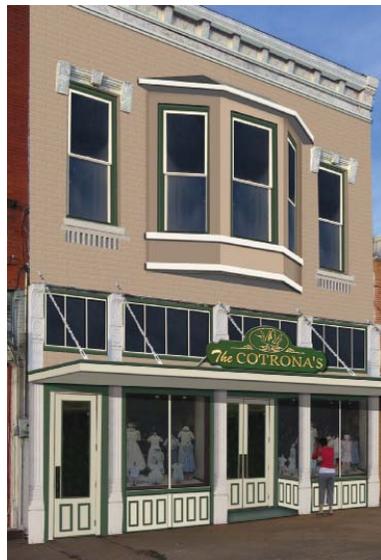
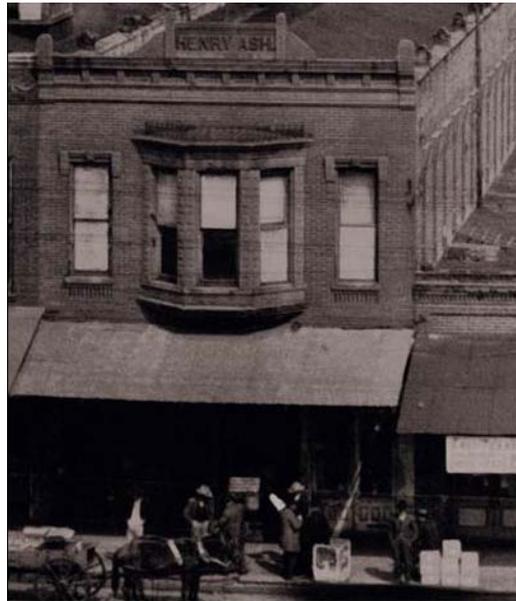
There's an old saying that money is like water and flows to the path of least resistance. Where market opportunities appear to be lacking, money will travel elsewhere along with the physical and human capital. Therefore, in order to level the playing field and make investment attractive, communities must often provide financial incentives to lure private capital.

Perhaps the reason the downtown is unable to attract investment is because there are extraordinary building costs associated with obsolescence, structural, or fire suppression. In such cases it may be appropriate to provide public incentives via low interest loans or grants for building improvements. Similarly, perhaps the reason buildings are vacant or underutilized is due to a lack of a strong retail or residential market. In such cases, lease subsidy programs may be offered by the public.

No matter what the challenge, it is always necessary to justify contributing public dollars toward private ventures. In times of declining municipal revenues, it is imperative that public programs demonstrate a positive cost-benefit relationship, and that the cost to rehabilitate or re-purpose downtown buildings is equal to or less than the value of the buildings

to the community. If it is not, then participation may not be in the public interest.

It seems obvious, but program evaluation tends to get pushed to the end of priority lists. However, the purpose of measuring the effectiveness of public expenditures is to replace rumors with fact about what the community is trying to accomplish.



In Palestine, public incentives via low interest loans or grants were helpful in restoring a historic downtown building that has been changed considerably over the years. The Texas Main Street design staff helped the owners visualize a full restoration of the building based on historic photographs.

Accordingly, Main Street managers should perform some comparative analysis on how well each of their programs is leveraging private capital.

The issue of public subsidies is complex and there is little agreement on how their effects can be adequately measured. Part of the lack of agreement is the complexity of the problem of evaluating the “But For” impact of subsidies on the local economy. The fact is while it is repeatedly argued that public investment is a necessary precondition for private businesses to thrive, most projects fail to test and measure if the subsidies were truly necessary or produced the desired results. Rather, we operate from the premise that any private business activity is better than nothing.

However, Main Street managers have access to first-hand evidence that demonstrates their effectiveness in leveraging private capital. Such measures can demonstrate the value of each program and influence public policy objectives. Public incentives are most effective when they are expressly targeted toward a downtown agenda. Measuring the economic impact of each program will help influence policy decisions by identifying market trends, return-on-investment, and where the level of investment is occurring within the district.

Many of the measurable results from brick and mortar projects may take months or even years to fully appear. As these lagging economic indicators are seldom tracked, it is important for Main

Incentive Programming of Participating Main Streets		
1	Sales Tax Reimbursement	25
2	Property Tax Abatement	44
3	Revolving Loan Fund	16
4	Low Interest Loan Program	30
5	Façade Program	68
6	Paint Program	56
7	Other Grants (roofs, interior, etc.)	19
8	Rent Subsidies	11
9	Fee Waivers	10
10	Utility Subsidies	4

As Main Street incentives cover the spectrum from construction loans to operational support, it is recommended that the collection, evaluation, and dissemination of public subsidies be divided into four categories: 1. Investment as a percentage of property value; 2. Investment per square foot; 3. Public’s Return-on-Investment; and 4. Other private investment.

Street managers to make the case for the importance of their programming today.

This article is not about which methodologies should be used; rather, managers should see this article as an idea of how data might be viewed to compare and contract results between various programs.

Program Background

According to the November 2015 report, 10 Criteria Survey of 70 Main Streets, the public financial incentives offered by Main Street communities fell into 10 common categories.

As public subsidies can become unpopular during difficult budget cycles, Main Street managers should monitor each program as if it were part of a downtown investment portfolio. In doing so, managers can be more strategic in their use of public resources. Moreover, data can

identify changes in the market place and suggest how public participation might be increased or redirected. Moreover, the data will demonstrate to the community that tax payer dollars are being wisely invested.

- **Starting Point.** Managers might consider augmenting some of the previous Quarterly Reinvestment data to establish a baseline. Data should focus on how private investment is leveraged, demonstrating that financial incentives like façade and tax abatement programs produce revenues in excess of the tax dollars sacrificed. As most of the categories for measure are a standard practice of the Main Street program, descriptions of each of the categories will be kept brief.
- **Investment as a Percentage of Property Value.** This is a measurement of the total project

investment as a percentage of the property's values. This figure indicates the level of investment required to maintain, adaptively re-use, or renovate a downtown building. Measuring this figure helps identify if supplemental financial incentives such as tax abatement or construction loans may be required to make projects financially feasible.

- Investment per Square Foot.** Measuring investment on a square foot basis allows comparisons between buildings of different age, size, and character. Collection and methodology needs to be standardized so that information is regular and comparable. Real estate comparisons on a per square foot basis are industry standards and allows comparisons outside the district that is understood by developers, investors, realtors, and bankers.
- Public's Return on Investment (ROI).** Measures the return on the public's investment. Metrics should take into consideration the structure of the Main Street program, e.g., if the city offers a façade program with a 50% match up to \$10,000. Naturally, one might assume that a property owner has a distinct motivation to invest up to the point where the rebate stops. However, if property owners are investing up to the threshold and many times beyond it, may be a sign that the level of rebate is inadequate for the level of rehabilitation required, or that other financial incentives may be considered.
- Other Investment.** It is equally

Main Street Incentive Program	Terms	Financial Limit
Façade	50%	\$10,000
Paint	50%	\$5,000
Signage	50%	\$2,500
Interior Renovation	50%	\$10,000

Project	Façade Program			Paint Program			Signage Program			Interior Renovation Program		
	P	PP	O	P	PP	O	P	PP	O	P	PP	O
1	2500	2500	3000	1500	1500	0	2500	2500	14000	10000	12500	3500
2	1500	1500	0	2500	2500	4500	2500	4000	3000	10000	11000	3000
3	4000	4000	5000	5000	8000	1500	2000	2000	0	10000	14000	0
4	3500	3500	0	3000	3000	1500	2500	12500	0	10000	22000	1500
5	5000	7500	3500	4000	4000	8500	1750	1750	0	3000	3000	0
6	1000	1000	0	1000	1000	2000	1500	1500	750	1500	1500	0
7	5000	15000	25000	3500	3500	0	2500	3500	5000	8500	8500	1500
Total	22500	35000	14000	20500	23500	32500	15250	27750	22750	43000	72500	9500
Avg. Project Investment	3214	5000	2000	2928	3357	4642	2178	3250	3142	6142	10357	1357
Public ROI		55%	117%		14.6%	173%		82%	231%		68%	90%
Cumulative												

P = Public Investment, PP = Private Investment, O = Other Investment

(Top) Table A provides some program assumptions for measuring the impact on public incentive programs (Façade, Paint, Signage, and Interior Renovation). Numbers are hypothetical and used only for illustrative purposes. (Bottom) Table B shows how program data might be used to determine the Return-on-Investment on a portfolio of public incentives (Façade, Paint, Signage, and Interior Renovation) and the spillover benefit of some programs over others.

important to capture the full extent of private investment. A \$5,000 façade incentive may have only induced the property owners to match the city's investment on the exterior; however, it spurred the owner to make investments to the roof, interior, or mechanical systems. This figure should be included when measuring the overall impact of a program.

The project's Return-on-Investment

(ROI) is a measure to evaluate the efficiency of individual programs as well as the entire portfolio relative to the public's investment. The return on investment formula:

$$ROI = \frac{\text{Private Investment} - \text{Public Investment}}{\text{Public Investment}}$$

The public's return on private investment under the Façade Program produces a public ROI of 55%. This is not a substantial

return given the fact that the program provides a 50% match. Apparently, property owners are making exterior improvements only to the point where the city is willing to match their investment. However, when taking into account the Other Investment as a result of the program, the positive spillover effect increases the public's ROI to 117%. This occurrence is not coincidental; as research has demonstrated that investment into real property tend to cascade beyond a certain threshold.

Conversely, the **Paint Program** does not appear to encourage property owners to invest to the program threshold and provides a modest public ROI of 14.6%. However, the cumulative public ROI comes to 173% and indicates that when property owners make an investment into building maintenance (paint) that other property improvements can be anticipated.

The **Signage Program** produces a respectable 82% ROI on the public's investment. Again, the cumulative public ROI rises to 231% when taking into account all property improvements. However, be mindful that while some programs provide the greatest return on the public's investment (paint and signage) they may do little to stabilize the condition of the property or increasing the property's taxable value. Case in point, the Interior Renovation Program, produces a modest a 68% public ROI and a cumulative ROI of 90% when other investments are taken into consideration. However, the Interior Renovation Program is the

most likely to assist a vacant building in becoming re-occupied, which in turn produces jobs, increased utility usage, rents, sales taxes, etc. Moreover, the Interior Renovation Program is most likely to address code violation, and ensure the sustainability of the property. As ad valorem tax account for 80% of all municipal tax revenues, your program's influence on property values becomes critical.

Lastly, you may want to begin tracking sales tax activity within your Main Street district. There is a direct correlation between typical Main Street programming and the sales taxes activity within the district. Sales taxes will show growth or deceleration of personal consumption spending across your downtown's retail industries. Reports may be ordered from the Texas Comptrollers Revenue Accounting Division.

SPECIAL VOLUNTEERS

We continue to spotlight in each edition of Main Street Matters those volunteers whose contributions and dedication are so important to the success of local programs. If you would like to honor a special volunteer with a spotlight, please send a short narrative and image to sarah.marshall@thc.state.tx.us.

Charlie & Traci Pyle, Brenham Main Street Program

When Charlie and Traci Pyle first purchased a building and business in downtown Brenham, little did they realize how involved they'd become with not only Main Street happenings and events, but also as leaders in this community.

In 1999, they purchased Must Be Heaven – a jewel of a restaurant and a favorite of both locals and tourists. This just so happened to coincide with Brenham's return to the Main Street program, after a steady 12 year decline since leaving the program in 1987. As their involvement grew, so did the popularity of their restaurant and downtown Brenham.

Charlie and Traci have been willing to take on a variety of roles over the years, eagerly rolling up their sleeves, no matter what is asked of them. They have dipped ice cream for hundreds of people at a festival, dressed up in costumes to portray historic characters, set up and manned beer booths each Saturday in July, and sponsored numerous programs and events. They have done it all.

After purchasing the restaurant in Brenham soon after the birth of their twins, Jacob and Julianna, Charlie was the first to become active and served two terms on the Main Street Board, while also serving on the economic restructuring committee. Once elected to a City Council position, Charlie left the advisory board, and Traci picked up the Main Street leadership mantle by serving on the board as chairman for four years, and also serving as chair of the very active promotions committee.



Both were instrumental in the “birth” of what has become the very successful Hot Nights, Cool Tunes Summer Concert Series that is held each Saturday night in July. They have been responsible for the planning, the selection of bands, and the set-up and manning of the beer booth mentioned earlier. Hot Nights, Cool Tunes began with 100 or so attendees, and over the course of 14 years, has grown into a very large production drawing thousands to this popular downtown event every summer.

It has been through their tireless dedication to this event that more than \$125,000 has been raised for downtown improvements, including the development of Toubin Park – a pocket park that shares some of the unique and fascinating history of our community.

In addition to all their physical efforts, Traci and Charlie capture the spirit of our community. They are always ready to rally the downtown troops to support Main Street projects and programs.

Charlie is currently portraying pharmacist Carl Glissmann for our Local History Day Programs in May, and with the Step Into the Past Historical Tour Program and video as well.

Traci has been instrumental in the success of the Uptown Swirl in Downtown Brenham and is always lending a hand in getting the word out to downtown businesses concerning programs and events. As can be expected after all these years, roles change and events evolve. Even though the summer

concert series has now been taken on by the City of Brenham’s Community Programs, and the sweltering summer beer booth is now a thing of the past, both of the Pyles are busy with their business, their soon-to-be high school senior twins, and with planning the next big things to happen with Main Street Brenham!

MAIN STREET EVENTS

CARTHAGE

Downtown Rodeo Jamboree
Saturday, May 7, 2016
9 a.m.–4 p.m.

Live entertainment all day, chili cook-off, food concessions, crafts and commercial vendors, rodeo queen’s contest, and much more. See [website](#) for full schedule.

ENNIS

50th Annual National Polka Festival
Friday, May 27—Sunday, May 29,
2016

Experience our traditions, religious customs, dancing, tastes, sights, sounds, and “a little bit of the Czech Lands” throughout historic downtown. See [website](#) for full schedule.

LEVELLAND

Downtown Sounds
Thursday, May 12, 2016
5:30–7:30 p.m.

Live music at the square. Stores will be open late and registration for the L.I.F.E. Fun Run will be available.

ROCKWALL

Night Owls Late Till 8!
May 12, 2016
5–8 p.m.

Downtown shops extend their hours offering promotions, live music, and discounts. Follow Downtown Rockwall, Texas on Facebook to acquire monthly event details.

San Jacinto Plaza Music Series
Friday, May 6 - Saturday, May 7, 2016
Friday, May 13 - Saturday, May 14,
2016
Friday, May 20 - Saturday, May 21,
2016
Friday, May 27 - Saturday, May 28,
2016
6:30–9 p.m.

Spend an evening in downtown Rockwall’s newest public gathering space. Colorful café style tables and chairs add to the ambiance of this live music venue. Cooler friendly venue.

Rockwall Farmers Market
Saturday, May 7, 2016
Saturday, May 14, 2016
Saturday, May 21, 2016
Saturday, May 28, 2016

The Farmers Market is a Saturday morning staple! With over 30 vendors, the market offers local fruits and vegetables, fresh baked breads, natural beef and poultry, seafood, cheese, farm eggs, pasta, honey, and much more. The market has become one of the area’s most popular destinations to purchase fresh produce and specialty foods.

SAN AUGUSTINE

Texas Treasure Heritage Festival
Saturday, May 7, 2016
9 a.m.–5 p.m.

Celebrate good food, shopping, art, music, demonstrations, displays by a gunsmith, boot and saddle crafters, wood artists, and more. Plus there will be a settlers' survival tent, Native American food, square dancing, music, presentations, and other activities that highlight Texas history and culture.

TAYLOR

Blackland Prairie Days
Saturday, May 7, 2016
10 a.m.—4 p.m.

Fun activities for the kids, including pony rides, petting zoo, face painting; vendors set up arts and crafts booths and a variety of foods. Join us for an annual barbecue cookoff and street dance in the evening. See [website](#) for all the details.

WAXAHACHIE

Crossroads of Texas Film Festival
Wednesday, May 18 – Saturday,
May 21, 2016

Four days of films and fun in downtown Waxahachie. Great panel discussions and special events along with special guests from the films being screened. For more information or to purchase tickets visit www.crossroadsoftx.com.

Websites of Interest

Advisory Council on Historic Preservation: www.achp.gov

African American Heritage Preservation Foundation: www.aahpfdn.org

(The) Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation: www.ahlp.org

(The) American Institute of Architects: www.aia.org

American Planning Association: www.planning.org

American Society of Landscape Architects: www.asla.org

(The) Cultural Landscape Foundation: www.tclf.org

(The) Handbook of Texas Online: www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online

Keep Texas Beautiful: www.ktb.org

League of Historic American Theatres: www.lhat.org

National Main Street Center: www.preservationnation.org/main-street

National Park Service: www.nps.gov

National Trust for Historic Preservation: www.preservationnation.org

Partners for Sacred Places: www.sacredplaces.org

Preservation Easement Trust: www.preservationeasement.org

PreservationDirectory.com: www.preservationdirectory.com

Preservation Texas: www.preservationtexas.org

Project for Public Spaces: www.pps.org

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy: www.railstotrails.org

Scenic America: www.scenic.org

Texas Department of Agriculture: www.TexasAgriculture.gov

Texas Commission on the Arts: www.arts.state.tx.us

Texas Downtown Association: www.texasdowntown.org

Texas Folklife Resources: www.texasfolklife.org

Texas Historical Commission: www.thc.state.tx.us

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department: www.tpwd.state.tx.us

Texas Rural Leadership Program: www.trlp.org

Texas State Preservation Board: www.tspb.state.tx.us

Urban Land Institute: www.uli.org

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TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
real places telling real stories

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