

Austin's not the only Texas capital

Capital-ism is big business for towns

United Press International
The claim may be as solid as miles of roses or as thin as helium. In some cases it may be all boast or it could be historical fact.

But whatever the reason and whatever the claim, being the capital of something in the world is a good source of civic pride, civic fun and outside money.

More than 20 Texas communities claim to be a capital and most have annual festivals built on their claims.

Gilmer in East Texas calls itself the "Yam Capital of the World" while San Angelo makes the same claim about "Mohair" and Crockett about "Fiddlers."

In Tyler the title is "Rose Capital of America" and it's not something the citizens have taken lightly since the first rose festival 41 years ago.

"It's a valid statement, not just a boast," said Dan Herod, one of the rose festival promoters. "We have more rose bushes growing in a 50-

mile radius of Tyler than any place in the nation."

Although the Tyler claim is verified by the American Rose Society, Herod says he can understand why some communities may claim capitalism, no matter how vague the title.

"It helps the economy for one thing," he said. "National statistics say tourists who stop in your town will spend an average of \$35 for every day they stay. Last year we had 200,000 people just sign the register at the Tyler Municipal Rose Garden."

"And the volunteers — people getting together to make the com-

munity a better place for others and making a better place for themselves. And, of course, there's pride. Pride's a big factor. You enjoy showing off your town."

In Floresville, the "Peanut Capital of the World," it's a recognition of the "the main source of income for the whole county," said Liz Howard. The community annually celebrates the harvest with a festival that includes a queen and various contests related to peanuts — including a shelling competition and a cooking contest using peanuts.

Luling is the "Watermelon Capital of the World" and Ann Manford says anyone who doesn't believe it could get hit with an 80-pound melon. Last June during the three-day Watermelon Thump the grand champion Black Diamond melon sold for \$3,000 — and it was just 68 pounds. Needless to say, the farming community exports tons of melons per year.

Amarillo's claim is as light as Luling's is heavy.

"Over 90 percent of the helium in the free world is stored in and around Amarillo," said Leslie Slak on behalf of the "Helium Capital of the World." There is no festival extolling the virtues of helium, but there is a three-story Helium Monument and

center that attracts about 20,000 visitors annually.

East Texas historian Bob Bowman says Terlingua can have its chili, all Lufkin wants is its hush puppies.

"Hunters and fishermen back at the turn of the century used to fry corn meal patties at night and then they'd throw some to their dogs to keep them quiet," he said. "That's how hush puppies got their name."

He said Lufkin, being in the middle of a rich hunting and fishing area, just naturally assumed itself to be the "Hush Puppy Capital of the World."

Visitors to Poteet in mid-April had best forget about their diets and dig out their wallets. Poteet is the "Strawberry Capital of the World" and every year thousands of people flock to the town south of San Antonio to sample strawberry shortcake and whatever else the competing cooks can think up to offer.

Last year the crate of strawberries (24 pints) judged the best was auctioned for \$2,700. The second place crate, however, only cost \$900.

San Saba City Manager James Reavis says his city, "The Pecan Capital of the World," owes its title to local researcher E.E. Risen, who did the first pecan grafting to improve yields in the early 1900s. Still remaining are long lazy streams

what's up at Texas A&M

WEDNESDAY

PLACEMENT SEMINAR: The Placement Center will present an entertaining and informative film on interviewing, followed by question and answer session at 4 p.m. in 206 MSC.

THE GROVE: Will present "Fiddler on the Roof" tonight at 8:45 p.m. Admission is 25 cents with Texas A&M I.D.

TAMU MICROCOMPUTER CLUB: Will have a summer organizational meeting at 7:30 p.m. in 203 Zachry.

THURSDAY

THE GROVE: Will feature the film of J.R.R. Tolkien's classic, "The Lord of the Rings," tonight at 8:45 p.m. Admission is 25 cents with Texas A&M I.D.

FRIDAY

DEGREE APPLICATION DEADLINE: Friday is the deadline for applying for graduate and undergraduate degrees to be awarded August for students completing degree requirements in July.

THE GROVE: Will present "Grease" at 8:45 p.m. and "Halloween" at midnight.

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Luckenbach, take a back seat

The lure of the Gruene

United Press International
GRUENE — On some Saturday nights as many as 1,000 people crowd into the "oldest dance hall in Texas," swig beer and kick up their heels to the music of a blaring country band that disturbs the calm of this century-old ghost town.

Gruene Hall has changed little since it was built in the 1880s as a recreation center for German cotton farmers who began settling this Comal County community four miles northeast of New Braunfels earlier last century.

The aged wood building has no air conditioning, so the nostalgia-seeking dancers sweat and curse ab-

out their discomfort as they sway across the creaking timbers cooled only by what breeze infiltrates the screened edifice.

"They bitch every weekend (about the conditions), but they come back the next weekend," smiles co-owner Pat Molak.

On the subject of making improvements, Molak says, "We won't touch it."

Molak, 32, has met such unexpected success with the dilapidated dance hall and a restaurant he has established in the ruins of the brick cotton gin's boiler room that burned

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in 1922 that he now is launching an ambitious plan to carefully revitalize the ghost town without changing its historic flavor.

"Gruene," pronounced "Green," was founded in 1872 by Ernst Gruene who envisioned the town as the hub of a farming empire, but it fell into disuse after his death in 1920. Five years later the boll weevil ravaged 8,000 acres of cotton and sent tenant farmers elsewhere to survive the Great Depression.

Until Molak and his partner, Mary Jane Nalley, both San Antonio natives, reopened the dance hall in 1974 after a half century of idleness, about the only activity in the town was the bar, which remained open in the front of the hall, and the Hadlock and Fox saddle treemaking business that operates in four of its ancient buildings.

Now they have set out to preserve the town's weathered structures, most of which are listed in the National Historical Register, in the same condition as they were 100 years ago. At the same time, they want to turn Gruene into a major tourist attraction.

The corporation, comprising Molak and Nalley, bought the old saddle works and plans to rebuild the buildings for shops that will detract from the town's Victorian architecture.

Besides its thriving dance hall, Gruene has a restaurant, where one can eat chicken fried steak and soda pop out of mason jars looking over the scenic Guadalupe River. Gruene now has Texas winery and tasting room, established in the remains of the old cotton gin, and the Gruene Company, which provides everything a person needs for a night through the rapids of the Guadalupe.

In recent years the ghost town replaced fabled Luckenbach (population 3), as the hang-out for progressive country music so on some weekends traffic is so across the river bridge that policemen have to patrol. Luckenbach, the object of a song by Nelson and Waylon Jennings, has been abandoned in recent years since the death of its former owner, Hondo Crouch, as a place for underground country music buffs because of its interior.

Nelson sometimes visits Gruene Hall, and maverick musician Jeff Walker, who wrote the

In recent years the ghost town has replaced fabled Luckenbach (population 3), as the hang-out for the progressive country music set.

"Mr. Bo Jangles," sometimes suds and plays his guitar on a stage he has staked out in a second-story door gazebo of the old Gruene dance hall to sip some beer.

He demonstrates the back-trek in time a 35-mile drive from San Antonio can exhibit by taking up three flights of stairs to the converted cotton gin room-restaurant.

Peering south across the river, Molak says, "on a clear day you can look right down this valley and see the lights of San Antonio."



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