

Mansion offers grace of

by Ann Ramsbottom
Battalion staff

Route 2, Navasota. Actually, closer to Plantersville...off Texas 105 East to FM 2445. You're not likely to stumble onto Southern Breeze Plantation and if you're not careful, you might miss it.

While establishments of fine food and entertainment are typically dressed to suit a particular mood and create a certain atmosphere, Southern Breeze Plantation takes you to the atmosphere. Gracious living, hospitality and everything the storybooks promise of a southern plantation.

Just off the dirt road a modest sign clearly identifies Southern Breeze Plantation. The sign hangs distinguished, leading to the plantation-style entryway. A meandering driveway leads up through 24 acres of landscaped grounds. Magnolias,

wisterias, azaleas...and fresh air. A quaint Victorian gazebo overlooks a small pond. A lawn swing dangles beneath a towering oak tree.

At the end of the drive stands a huge plantation home; magnificent, yet subtle. An old-fashioned rocker sways on the porch.

Part-owner Willa Lowe pondered over a fitting description of her business. A restaurant...not really, a meeting facility...more than that, an activity center...possibly.

"No, Southern Breeze Plantation really doesn't fit into any of these categories," Lowe said.

Southern Breeze Plantation is a seven-year-old, family-owned, family-operated business that resulted from the long-range plans of Mrs. Billie Dell Layne Parks. Her dream was to create a family business centered around fine food. Parks moved to Grimes County in January 1977 to initiate her dream. A few weeks later she died.

Parks' three daughters: Willa Lowe, Mary Lou Epps and Kim Parks pursued her dream. The three daughters and three full-time employees (including a sister-in-law and some childhood friends) make up the staff of Southern Breeze Plantation.

"The employees are more family than staff," Lowe said. "We all work together seven days a week preparing and hosting. Just keeping up the grounds is a full time job."

The most popular offering at Southern Breeze Plantation is the formal dining facility. Groups of eight to 90 reserve the morning, afternoon, evening or entire day.

"The group has the facility entirely to themselves during this



time," Lowe said. "Meetings, parties and weddings are some of the frequent groups we host. Social, religious, fraternal, business and/or family groups also enjoy barbeques, plays, musicians and formals. We plan to add an overnight cabin facility on our 24 adjoining acres of undeveloped land."

"We also offer samplers on a regular basis," Lowe said. "These are individual or group events including such activities as instruction on gingerbread house-making and sugar egg-making. We also offer hot-air ballooning on a regular basis. Each of these samplers are accompanied by a home-cooked meal."

Home-cooked meals are a highlight of Southern Breeze Plantation.

"All three of us cook," Lowe said. "Everything is home-made from scratch. That includes bread and decorated cakes

which we make for special orders."

Homemade bread and honey are always present on the dinner tables to honor the Grimes County tradition: the land of milk and honey. The rest of the menu is not so basic, however.

The group reserving the facility may choose from any one of 14 menus ranging from sour cream breast of chicken to seafood creole over rice or quail with wild rice. These selections may be completed with such finales as chocolate covered crumble balls made with vanilla ice cream, crepes with fruit filling, liquor and a sprinkling of almonds or chocolate marble cheesecake.

"All group reservations are very individualized," Lowe said. "We like for our guests to feel as though they're eating at home. To further create this mood we work as little from a cash register as possible."



photos by John Makely



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