



# Local museum hosts 'Hometown Oil' exhibit

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It's not the Louvre or the Museum of Modern Art, but then we're not Paris or New York City. The Brazos Valley Museum is a museum nonetheless and its doors have been open for residents of Bryan-College Station for six years.

It's quietly tucked away in the east end of the contemporary Brazos Center at 3232 Briarcrest Drive. It's unassuming and discreet, hosting interactive exhibits and educational programs for children throughout the year.

The museum is presently hosting an exhibit called "Hometown Oil," which creatively gives museum patrons an in-depth look at the local gas and oil industry. Each room of the exhibit calls for visitor participation.

"When you walk into the area," says exhibit coordinator Diana Baker, "you become an exploration geophysicist. Your goal is to find reservoir rock which contains oil."

To complete this mission, museum patrons become oil explorers, as they arm themselves with a clipboard, a calculator, a pencil and a gamebook describing the oil discovery and land-leasing process. At one point during the game, four chairs and a table covered with a red-checked tablecloth await the participants.

"In the early days of oil exploration," Baker says, "families met with a leasing agent in their kitchen to discuss the drilling and leasing of their land. We recreated that scene,

where museum visitors can sit in this kitchen and roll dice to determine their next move in the leasing process."

The game ends after each participant chooses a "drilling site" and inserts a stick into a peg board which represents land in Brazos Valley. If the peg "hits oil" you've won the game and a bumper sticker which reads "Wildcat at the Brazos Valley Museum."

Baker says she and museum staff members worked intensely for about four months to construct the "Hometown Oil" exhibit.

Museum Director Valeen Silvy says the Brazos Valley Museum, before hosting the "Hometown Oil" exhibit, hosted an exhibit called "Cotton in the Brazos Valley."

"The cotton exhibit is now split into two exhibits," Silvy says. "One part of the exhibit is in a storefront window of the old Lester's building in downtown Bryan. Another part of the exhibit is on display in a bank in downtown Calvert."

Silvy says the museum receives major funding from the Astin and Winkler Trusts and the United Way to present programs and exhibits.

"Along with the Astin Trusts, which are set up as educational funds for non-profit, community organizations," Silvy explains, "the museum relies on funding from the Arts Council of Brazos Valley and from private donations to make programming successful."

The museum's Board of Trustees throws an annual fundraiser to provide additional operating money for the museum.

"For the last two years," Silvy

says, "we've had a 'Discovery Night' fundraiser, with champagne and conversation with speakers like A&M anthropology professor Gentry Steele."

"This year, we decided to have a party to raise funds for the museum," she says. "It's called 'kaleidoscope of cultures' — an evening of fun which highlights six ethnic cultures in the Brazos Valley, each culture featured in a large tent on the grounds in front of the Brazos Center. It'll be on Sept. 27 from 7 p.m. until midnight. Between 7 and 9 p.m., each tent will have a dinner with ethnic food and drink, demonstrations and exhibits."

Silvy outlines the cultural festivities in each tent:

- In the "Black tent," guests can sample greens and hot water cornbread, listen to the Texas A&M Gospel Singers, watch breakdancers and view a photo exhibit about Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement.

- In the "Czech tent," guests can listen to music from a hammered dulcimer (an instrument similar to a xylophone), sample Czechoslovakian desserts and watch Czech folk dancing.

- In the "Italian tent," guests can sample antipasto dishes from Cenare Italian restaurant, taste wine from Messina Hoff, observe grape stomping and listen to accordian music.

- In the "Mexican tent," guests can sample flautas by Jose's restaurant and watch the "Folklorico Dancers."

- In the "Texana tent," guests can sample food from Randy Sims Bar-B-Que House and chicken fried steaks

from Ken Martin's Steak House. There will also be mechanical bull riding and a quilting display.

- In the "Indian tent," guests can sample pre-cooked bison meatballs and observe a flint knapping demonstration.

Gentry Steele, an A&M anthropology professor who's preparing activities for the Indian tent, says flint knapping demonstrations will show guests at the "kaleidoscope of cultures" how arrowheads are made.

"There will also be an artifact display of pottery pieces and pieces of animal bone which were recovered from an archeological site off Highway 21 a few years ago," Steele says.

Steele and Mike Stevens, an A&M architectural and environmental design student, are designing a 100 feet helium balloon sculpture for the event.

There's more than just the ethnic food, drink and entertainment in these six tents at the "kaleidoscope of cultures."

Silvy says at 9:00 p.m. there will be an auction of such items as two halves of butchered sides of beef, jewelry, clothing gift certificates and four tickets in the Chancellor's Box for the A&M-Houston football game.

After the auction, she says there will be a street dance in the parking lot of the Brazos Center until midnight.

Tickets for the fundraiser are \$30 per couple. Guests also have the option of making a \$50 tax-deductible donation and receiving two complimentary tickets to the "kaleidoscope of cultures," along with a family membership to the museum. □