



# Main Street Matters

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## Spotlight on Pharr

### The State's First Triple Crown City

It isn't everyday that Pharr gets to be the first at something in Texas. So when this happened back in March, the community went into a frenzy of excitement that included developing a welcome sign to highlight Pharr's statewide achievement. In naming Pharr the first "Triple Crown City" in Texas, the state senate not only recognized the city's efforts since it became an "official" Texas Main Street City in 2004, but also honored Pharr's heritage that during much of the last century earned it a reputation as the HUB City of the Valley.

On one hand, the Triple Crown City designation represents three national



*This new adaptive reuse open-air courtyard, La Placita, in downtown was completed last year. It sits right across the street from City Hall (the 4-story building in the background).*

awards Pharr earned during consecutive years — i.e. the National Preserve America City (2004), the National Main Street City (2005) and the All-America City (2006) awards. On the other hand, the state also recognizes Pharr's foresight in reaching milestones that turned it into a city of "FIRSTS" in the Rio Grande Valley, including: the first Preservation Master Plan (2004), the first form-based standards (2005), the county's first historic Main Street district (2005), the first to adopt the International Existing Building Code (2005), the first urban design plan for downtown (2006) and the first to identify a number of heritage trails in downtown (seven in all) as part of the City's Trails Master Plan (2004). Most of all, with the 2009 Centennial Agenda for Action (2004), Pharr became the first among regional cities nearing their centenary to kick start a countdown walk along the Centennial trail in preparation for 2009, a full five years ahead. In 2005, Pharr was also showcased by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (H.U.D) in a national publication, as one of three model communities in the country. Last year, the American Planners Assoc. (APA) recognized Pharr's home-grown approach to downtown revitalization using Smart Growth principles.

Pharr was blessed with a strategic location even before its founding in 1909 at one of the crossroads of the



*Local participant in the 2006 "World's First Barbacoa Cook Off" prepares a round of samplings for judges in downtown Pharr.*

Chisholm Trail in the region. The result is that as the HUB City for nearly a century, Pharr is now the region's starting point for marker trails galore. Nearly, a hundred historical markers in the county of Hidalgo are within a 15-minute drive from downtown. A downtown walking and driving tour also includes the Old Clock and the Jukebox Museums, two of the most unique collections in the country. Standing as sentinels of the city's past, present and future are also key landmarks that speak about Pharr's integral role in opening the irrigation, commercial, transportation and agricultural frontiers in the re-



By the end of 2006, 16 eateries and restaurants, including Happy Dayz, called Pharr's historic downtown home — up from just eight in 2001.

gion. In downtown, for example, they include the first Kiwanis Club meeting place in the world, the old City Hall, the Valley Fruit and Vegetable Co. (VFC) packing facility and the Texan Hotel, built by the family of former vice presidential nominee for the Democratic party in 1988, Senator Lloyd Bentsen. The old City Hall also housed the Louisiana-Rio Grande Canal Co. that built the Hidalgo pumping station. The station transformed more than 40,000 acres in the early 1900s and helped in part earn the region a reputation as the “Winter Garden of Texas” — the Magic Valley for locals. The station is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and now serves as a museum in Hidalgo. The 111,000-sq-ft. VFC packing facility, an icon of the Valley’s agricultural heritage, also played a pivotal role in cementing Pharr’s role as the HUB City during the 1940s. The building’s roof is a unique aircraft hangar-type structure patented in Nazi Germany, last custom-built in the States in the 1940s. Now in the process of renovation, the building will house the regions’ first Farm-to-Market Museum and be the headquarters for the Food Bank RGV — a multi-million dollar corporation.

Pharr is also a historic stopover along the prestigious *Los Caminos Del Rio* (LCR) heritage corridor — a bi-national route that highlights the leg-

acy of the borderlands from the early exploration days to today’s evolving legacy of three worldviews — the Tejano, Anglo and Spanish that continue to merge over centuries under the cultural mantle of today’s regional metropolis, Monterrey, a city of 4 million people in Mexico, a short 3 hours south of the Rio Grande.

Tourists in downtown can enjoy special events during the year including Pharr’s two signature events: The “*Los Caminos Del Rio Day*” that honors the confluence of cultures in Pharr and the “World’s First *Barbacoa* Annual Cook-Off” that pits the best Tejano-style BBQ restaurants each April. This year’s *Best Barbacoa* crown belongs to Letty’s restaurant in downtown. Other downtown events include the Pedestrian Mall and Annual Christmas Tree Lighting Fiesta in December, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July fireworks, the Pharr HUB *Phestival* in March and the Pharr Out Nature Day and the Fire Fest in October. Typical independent restaurants to enjoy in downtown include: The HUB Café, once featured in the *Texas Monthly*, now offers specialty dishes such as “*Deer en Salsa*” and “*Shrimp a la Diabla*”; the district’s premier Mexican American restaurant, the



In 2005, U.S. Rep. Lloyd Doggett, D-Austin unveiled downtown’s LCR heritage monument and kick started the 2009 Centennial Agenda for Action.

Junction Café, a pilgrimage stop by Winter Texans; the Habanero Café in the historic Texan Hotel offers Pharr’s “official” 2006 *Phestival* dish, “Chicken Breast con Queso”; Las Margaritas restaurant and its award-winning Botanas; Irma’s Sweete Shoppe, listed as a South Texas plains destination in the *Texas Highways* magazine for its Texas-size sweet rolls and lunch plates “like Mama used to make”; Uncle Roy’s, a powerhouse of BBQ food in the area; Taquería del Tío and its award winning *Menudo* soup and Poncho’s, offering the region’s top taco “you must eat before you die”, says *Texas Monthly*. Over a dozen destination restaurants claim Pharr’s historic downtown as their home making it an oasis for the region’s industry —more than any other in a three-county area that includes McAllen, a major city and Roma, a historic town.

## NEWS

### Philadelphia to Host National Main Streets Conference

The 2008 National Main Streets Conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania will explore the ways entrepreneurship and diversity enrich commercial districts. These qualities add to the local flavor, create a true reflection of a community, contribute to an authentic identity and exciting business mix — all essential motivations that bring customers, tourists, new residents, and cool businesses to your district. The dates of the conference are March 30–April 2. This is an excellent conference for managers and board members alike—it is so good that many states require attendance. For more conference, hotel and registration information, go to <http://conference.mainstreet.org/content.aspx?page=11247&site=13>.

## WELCOME

We welcome Diane Peak to Main Street as the new manager in Clarksville.

## AROUND THE STATE IN MAIN STREET

The Texas Department of Agriculture announced the winners of the 2007 Hardworking Rural Community Awards, which spotlight rural Texas communities working hard to boost tourism, job growth, leadership mentoring, community development and other economic opportunities. Ten communities were selected for honors this year. These communities are recognized for the dedication, leadership and ingenuity shown by community volunteers, business owners and city and county officials - all working together to preserve the past, celebrate the present and anticipate the future. Congratulations to two Main Street cities, **Clifton** and **Monahans**, that were among the ten winners. These cities will receive a \$1,500 grant which can be applied to future community development efforts.

The Texas Historical Commission (THC) awards grants for preservation projects from the Texas Preservation Trust Fund (TPTF). TPTF grants pay up to one-half of total project costs to help preserve Texas' cultural resources. Grant funds are awarded for acquisition, development, planning and heritage education. Congratulations to the following Texas Main Street cities receiving awards: **Bowie** City Auditorium \$30,000, **San Angelo** City Hall \$24,978, **Spur** Palace Theater \$23,500, **Old Nacogdoches** University Building \$30,000, **Rio Grande City** Moth Ball project \$10,600 and **Beeville's** Rialto Theater \$23,238. Applications will be available in the spring of 2008 for the 2009 grant cycle.

With the closing of numerous businesses due to hurricane Rita, it is very good news for **Beaumont** that Mobil Oil Federal Credit Union is opening in downtown.

## EVENTS

### **January 5, Beaumont:**

The Spindletop Gusher Celebration recognizing Beaumont's heritage, the Lucas Gusher will blow once again. Members of the Gulf Coast Living History Association will re-enact the discovery of oil on January 10th, 1901. Time will be 2 p.m.-3 p.m. and the cost is free. Location is Highway 69 at University Drive. Call 409/835-0823 or visit [www.spindletop.org](http://www.spindletop.org).

### **Jan. 11, Pharr**

The city celebrates its "All America" designation by paying homage to other local municipalities who have received the same designation at Gala of the Shield. Join in "A Tribute to the All America City," a night of music and exquisite cuisine. Begins at 6 p.m. Pharr International Convention Center, 3000 N. Cage. Call 956/702-5335.

### **Jan. 12, Marshall**

Watch local artists creating original pieces, enjoy live music and listen to the harmony of the Words & Voices Concert Series at the Main Street Second Saturday Festival. Location is downtown on North Washington Avenue. Call 903/935-4417.

### **Jan. 17, Levelland**

Highlighting accomplishments of the Main Street board, Levelland will be celebrating a decade of Main Street at their celebration breakfast. All entities that have contributed to this success will be invited. Event will be from 7:30 a.m. to 9 a.m.

### **Jan. 23-Feb. 24, Laredo**

Washington's Birthday Celebration is one of the biggest and oldest celebrations of the first president's birthday. Celebrated since 1898, this event is a unique mixture of a Mexican fiesta and a Fourth of July celebration - an opportunity for everyone to experience 29 events in 25 fun-filled days. Activities include parades, pageants, street parties, concerts, carnival, children's Fun Fest, fireworks, jalapeno festival and more. Call 956/722-0589 or visit [www.wbcalaredo.org](http://www.wbcalaredo.org).

### **January 25-27, Laredo**

The 6th annual International Sister Cities Festival celebrates Laredo's twenty sister cities from around the world including cities from Mexico, Spain, China, Taiwan, Argentina and Australia. In celebration of Laredo's unique relationship with these international siblings, the festival features an expo with products for sale and displays from each of the participating cities. Exotic flowers, embroidered textiles, wrought iron, wood furniture, silver jewelry and more will be available for purchase. Time will be 10 a.m. and the cost is free at 2400 San Bernardo. Call 800/361-3360 or visit [www.laredosistercities.com](http://www.laredosistercities.com).

### **February 1, Freeport**

Let the good times roll on the Old Brazos River at Freeport's Mardi Gras Masquerade Ball. Dress up in masquerade attire or basic black. Music will be by Lady "D" and the Zydeco Tornados and the Lake Jackson Jazz Ensemble. There will be a silent auction and auction for the title of "King and Queen of Mardi Gras." All proceeds go to support the work of Main Street Freeport. Time will be 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. and cost is \$25. Location is River Place Center Mu-



nicipal Park, 400 Brazosport Blvd.  
Call 979/233-3526 or visit  
[www.freeportmainstreet.com](http://www.freeportmainstreet.com).

### February 1–3, Beaumont

Mardi Gras on the Neches will include parades and activities for the entire family and will begin in downtown. The new Mardi Gras festivities will be held in conjunction with Crockett Street's existing Mardi Gras celebrations. Location will be in the Crockett Street historic district. Call 409/724-0450.

### Feb. 3, McKinney

Patterned after the legendary Mystic Krewe of Barkus in New Orleans which was established to help abused and abandoned canines, McKinney will have the Krewe of Barkus Dog Parade. Historic downtown calls in all dogs and dog lovers to gesture a dog parade and a dog costume contest. The parade will be at 2 p.m. on the historic downtown square.

## CONFERENCES/ WORKSHOPS

### Texas Tourism Industry Dinner

Join more than a thousand of your colleagues, along with state legislators, mayors, city council members and other elected officials, as we come together to celebrate travel and tourism in Texas at the Faces and Places of Texas 2008 Unity Dinner. The dinner will be at the Hilton in Austin on **February 13**. Visit [www.ttia.org/unity/](http://www.ttia.org/unity/)

### Free Monthly Trainings from The Alliance for Community Trees

The Alliance for Community Trees offers a free monthly training (webcast) for anyone interested in

issues pertaining to preserving and planting their urban canopy. The series is geared for volunteer organizers, community groups, and others who work with the public. Registration is required. More information, including the list of topics that will be covered through March 2008, can be found at [http://actrees.org/site/stories/act\\_launches\\_monthly\\_webcast\\_series.php#subscribe](http://actrees.org/site/stories/act_launches_monthly_webcast_series.php#subscribe).

### 2008 National Main Streets Conference

Who attends this conference? Everyone interested in community revitalization. Beginner or expert, small town or urban business district, people who work, volunteer or are interested in community revitalization will value this educational and networking experience.

The 2008 National Main Streets Conference **March 30–Apr. 2** in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania will explore the ways entrepreneurship and diversity enrich commercial districts. These qualities add to the local flavor, create a true reflection of a community, contribute to an authentic identity and exciting business mix — all essential motivations that bring customers, tourists, new residents and cool businesses to your district. See <http://conference.mainstreet.org/content.aspx?page=11247&site=13>

## GRANTS

Interpreting America's Historic Places Grants  
Interpreting America's Historic Places implementation and planning grant applications due **Jan. 23, 2008**.

Implementation Grants:  
[www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/IAHP\\_Implementation.html](http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/IAHP_Implementation.html)

Planning Grants:  
[www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/IAHP\\_Planning.html](http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/IAHP_Planning.html)

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## 2008 Calendar of Events

- **January 7–9, Austin**  
Basic Training for new managers, Austin
  - **February 5–8, Austin**  
Basic Training for new managers is on Feb. 5 and the morning of Feb. 6. Main Street Annual Meeting is Feb. 6–8 (beginning after noon and ending at noon on the 8<sup>th</sup>)
  - **February 6–8, Austin**  
Main Street Annual Meeting (begins the afternoon of Feb. 6 and ends by noon on Feb. 8)
  - **March 30–April 2, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**  
National Main Streets Annual Conference, 2008 theme: Enriching Main Street Through Entrepreneurship and Diversity (This conference is always excellent — consult with your city manager or your boards now to see if you can fit it into your budgets.)
  - **May 1–3, Corpus Christi**  
Texas Historical Commission Annual Conference, 2008 theme: Explore the Sights and Stories of Texas.
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## Web Sites of Interest

Advisory Council on Historic Preservation: [www.achp.gov](http://www.achp.gov)  
African American Heritage Preservation Foundation: [www.aahpf.org](http://www.aahpf.org)  
(The) Alliance for Historic Landscape Preservation: [www.ahlp.org](http://www.ahlp.org)  
(The) Alliance for National Heritage Areas: [www.cofc.edu/~heritage](http://www.cofc.edu/~heritage)  
American Institute of Architects: [www.aiaonline.com](http://www.aiaonline.com)  
American Planning Association: [www.planning.org](http://www.planning.org)  
American Society of Landscape Architects: [www.asla.org](http://www.asla.org)  
(The) Cultural Landscape Foundation: [www.tclf.org](http://www.tclf.org)  
Handbook of Texas Online: [www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online](http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online)  
Institute for Cultural Landscape Studies: [www.icls.harvard.edu](http://www.icls.harvard.edu)  
Keep Texas Beautiful: [www.ktb.org](http://www.ktb.org)  
League of Historic American Theaters: [www.lhat.org](http://www.lhat.org)  
Livable Communities Task Force:  
[www.blumenauer.house.gov/issues/CaucusSummary.aspx?NewsID=1077&IssueID=11](http://www.blumenauer.house.gov/issues/CaucusSummary.aspx?NewsID=1077&IssueID=11)  
National Park Service: [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)  
National Trust for Historic Preservation: [www.nthp.org](http://www.nthp.org)  
Office of Rural Community Affairs: [www.orca.state.tx.us](http://www.orca.state.tx.us)  
Preservation Easement Trust: [www.preservationeasement.org/home](http://www.preservationeasement.org/home)  
Preservation Directory: [www.preservationdirectory.com](http://www.preservationdirectory.com)  
Preservation Texas: [www.preservationtexas.org](http://www.preservationtexas.org)  
Project for Public Spaces: [www.pps.org](http://www.pps.org)  
Rails to Trails: [www.railstotrails.org](http://www.railstotrails.org)  
Sacred Places: [www.sacredplaces.org](http://www.sacredplaces.org)  
Scenic America: [www.scenic.org](http://www.scenic.org)  
Texas Commission on the Arts: [www.arts.state.tx.us](http://www.arts.state.tx.us)  
Texas Downtown Association: [www.texasdowntown.org](http://www.texasdowntown.org)  
Texas Folklife Resources: [www.texasfolklife.org](http://www.texasfolklife.org)  
Texas Historical Commission: [www.thc.state.tx.us](http://www.thc.state.tx.us)  
Texas Parks and Wildlife: [www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us)  
Texas Rural Leadership Program: [www.trlp.org](http://www.trlp.org)  
Texas State Preservation Board: [www.tspb.state.tx.us](http://www.tspb.state.tx.us)  
Urban Land Institute: [www.uli.org](http://www.uli.org)

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**TEXAS  
HISTORICAL  
COMMISSION**

*The State Agency for Historic Preservation*

[www.the.state.tx.us](http://www.the.state.tx.us)