FUN
33
THINGS TO DO AROUND WACO

Photo by Ken Sury
By Ken Sury

As we head into the final month of summer, before football games and school activities become the routine for many, Waco Today presents a list of fun things and places to go in Waco and nearby.

Many Central Texans have experienced these sites, events and activities. But these are all worth checking out. If you haven't done them yet, there's still time.

Why 33? It's a fun number. The list could easily have been longer, but all lists have to stop somewhere.

Please note: this is not a ranking; No. 14 is not better than No. 27, though our choices for No. 1 and No. 2 in the list do seem like they deserve those spots.

Let's get to it!

1. **MAGNOLIA MARKET AT THE SILOS**

   Estimates of 25,000 visitors a week — from everywhere, it seems — are coming to check out the place thanks to the popularity of Chip and Joanna Gaines’ “Fixer Upper” show on the HGTV Network.

   Magnolia folks have smartly made it an engaging stop, and not just for the items to purchase in the Marketplace and the Magnolia Bakery. It’s laid out with areas for kids to play, swings to enjoy, food trucks lined up as the “siotería” for hungry visitors, even misters to cool you off in the heat of the day.

   Helpful workers are spread out across the property, always ready to take photos with the visitors’ cell phones.

   Those visitors are also exploring the businesses and sights around Magnolia and throughout downtown. The Dr Pepper Museum and Free Enterprise Institute on Fifth Street is seeing record numbers of visitors, and not just because it expanded its museum and interactive offerings.

   The Gaineses’ vision to show off their hometown becomes real at Magnolia.

   **ADDRESS:** 601 Webster Ave.
   **PHONE:** 235-6111
   **ONLINE:** magnoliamarket.com/silos

   [Continued on Page 20]
CAMERON PARK

One of the jewels of Waco, Cameron Park is a 416-acre park named for Waco philanthropist and lumber baron William Cameron.

With 15 miles of hiking and biking trails, Cameron Park hosts numerous races and events.

The limestone cliffs that line the Brazos River make for spectacular views from areas like Lovers Leap. Those wanting to test their stamina can make the trek up the crazy staircase that is Jacob’s Ladder.

A 23-hole disc golf course is in Cameron Park, with a separate 18-hole course at nearby Brazos Park East, which also offers horseshoe pits and a boat launch.

The Cameron Park Zoo comprises 52 acres of the park and is a great place to visit for any age.

Cameron Park features three large playgrounds — Pecan Bottoms, Anniversary Park and the Northern Gateway — that have swings, slides, bridges and climbing obstacles. Pecan Bottoms features a splash pad while the Northern Gateway has water misters to help contend with the summer heat.

Miss Nellie’s Pretty Place is a wildflower preserve not far from the Cameron Park Clubhouse.

ADDRESS: 2601 Sturgis Road
PHONE: 750-5980
ONLINE: waco-texas.com
The city’s most iconic landmark crosses the Brazos River with a main span of 475 feet.

Opened in 1870, it was the first major suspension bridge in Texas and enabled stagecoaches and cattle to cross the often treacherous Brazos without incident. It was a huge boon to commerce for Waco.

By 1971, the bridge had seen more than 100 years of traffic, from cattle and stagecoaches initially to cars and trucks. The state historical committee decided that it was time to be retired and it now is limited to foot traffic, but it often is the finish line for marathons and other races in Waco.

It is on the National Register of Historic Places and is a popular location to take photos for weddings and proms, as well as tossing tortillas, trying to get them to land on a nearby concrete platform. Tortillas that miss the mark and land in the water are happily and quickly consumed by ducks.

The bridge connects Indian Spring Park, which hosts numerous community events, with Martin Luther King Jr. Park.

In 2008, the first pieces of the “Branding the Brazos” sculptures debuted next to the bridge. The Chisholm Trail sculptures include an oversized, bronze trail boss driving longhorns on their way to crossing the Brazos.

The Waco Riverwalk includes approximately seven miles of a lighted trail that loops along both banks of the Brazos. It stretches from Baylor University to Cameron Park and passes underneath the bridge.
The soaring success of Balcones Distilling is enough to make your head spin ... and that’s not its award-winning whisky talking.

Earlier this year, the whisky maker opened its new 65,000-square-foot, nearly $15 million distillery downtown in the former Texas Fireproof Storage Building.

Production capacity nearly doubled thanked to its three-story copper stills brought in from Forsyths, Scotland.

Balcones barreled its first whisky distilled at the new building in February and celebrated its official grand opening in April. The new location is a much bigger space than the old site under the 17th Street railway viaduct.

Chamber officials expect Balcones to be another downtown draw for the visitors already coming to Waco to experience Magnolia Market at the Silos.

A gift shop and tasting room are in the works at Balcones, which hopes to begin offering tours of the distillery in the fall.

ADDRESS: 225 S. 11th St.
PHONE: 755-6003
ONLINE: balconesdistilling.com
SHOP, EXPLORE DOWNTOWN WACO AND BEYOND

The revitalization of downtown Waco certainly has benefited from the emergence of Magnolia Market at the Silos and the steady stream of “Fixer Upper” fans coming to visit and then explore parts of Waco.

But there are many hands at work in this process, from city leaders and entrepreneurial visionaries, to small-business owners looking to take a chance with a restaurant, cafe, food truck or night-time entertainment venue. The variety of businesses staking claims downtown runs the gamut, from a sugar-coated confectionary to whisky maker to coffeehouse, to shabby chic or vintage antique shops, jewelry makers and artisans, clothing stores and flower shops.

While you’re downtown and need a quick bite, visit the food trucks along Austin Avenue or the group that sits at the corner of Franklin Avenue and University Parks Drive.

And lest anyone think it’s only happening downtown, there’s plenty of places for shoppers to browse — and hopefully buy — whether it’s along Valley Mills or Waco drives, Central Texas Marketplace or an updated Richland Mall.

If you’re not sure where to look, peruse the next few pages that showcase local businesses. That’s certain to give you a few ideas.

> Continued on Page 27
The Waco Mammoth National Monument is a paleontological site and museum where the fossils of 24 Columbian mammoths and other mammals from the Pleistocene epoch (more commonly called the Ice Age) have been uncovered.

After years of effort by the city of Waco, Baylor University, the Waco Mammoth Foundation and Waco residents, President Barack Obama signed an executive order designating the Waco Mammoth National Monument on July 10, 2015. It is the 408th unit of the National Park Service and 14th unit in Texas.

In a dig shelter on the 5-acre site, visitors can see in situ (still in their original position within the bone bed) sub-fossil remains of six Columbian mammoths and a few other Ice Age animals. Crews also uncovered the remains of a Western camel, dwarf antelope, alligator, giant tortoise and the tooth of a juvenile saber-toothed cat.

**ADDRESS:** 6220 Steinbeck Bend Drive  
**PHONE:** 750-7946  
**ONLINE:** waco-texas.com  
www.wacoelectrolysis.com  
www.wacoorganic.com  
www.wacoorganic.com

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**WACO MAMMOTH NATIONAL MONUMENT**

Photo by Rod Aydelotte

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LAKE WACO

This has been a rare summer that boaters, fishermen and swimmers have not been on Lake Waco. Springtime flooding overwhelmed the parks, swimming beaches and Lake Waco Marina. Even campers have been affected because of flooded campgrounds.

Any other summer would find the lake — a reservoir with the dam located on the Bosque River — filled with boats. The lake is run by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Fishing for catfish and largemouth bass is excellent on the lake, according to Texas Parks and Wildlife.

The lake has four campgrounds: Airport Park, Reynolds Creek Park, Midway Park and Speegleville Park. RV, tent and group camping facilities are available. Camping is permitted in designated areas. Airport Beach in Airport Park has a roped-off swimming area when the lake level isn’t high.

The Heart of Texas Miniature Aircraft Club (HOTMAC) has an 800-foot-long runway for flying radio-controlled model aircraft near Speegleville Park.

ONLINE: www.swf-wc.usace.army.mil/waco/ (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)
The 180-acre wetlands on Lake Waco was constructed by the city of Waco, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service after the Waco City Council in 1998 voted to increase the lake’s pool by 7 feet to provide additional drinking water for Central Texas.

The wetlands would serve as partial fulfillment for replacing habitat lost as the lake was raised.

Also built there is a 6,000-square-foot Lake Waco Wetlands Research and Education Center. It hosts classes for students of Baylor University’s biology department and serves as a living lab. It also implements outreach efforts to educate the community and local schoolchildren about reservoir systems and related water issues.

Nature photographers enjoy capturing photos of bald eagles that have established nests in the wetlands.

**ADDRESS:** 1752 Eichelberger Crossing Road

**PHONE:** 848-9654

**ONLINE:** waco-texas.com/cms-wetlands

[Continued on Page 30]
The state officially designated Clifton as the Norwegian Capital of Texas, but the Bosque County town of around 3,500 also is known for its history and a bustling arts community.

Clifton and the land around it was settled by Norwegian immigrants in the mid-19th century. The nearby community of Norse is the final resting place of Cleng Peerson, the “Father of Norwegian Immigration to America.” He is interred in the cemetery at Our Savior’s Lutheran Church.

Clifton celebrates its Norwegian heritage with a Christmas tour the first Saturday of December.

The Bosque Museum houses the Horn Shelter Exhibit, which reproduces an area near the Brazos River where the remains of an adult male and child, along with burial goods, all more than 11,000 years old, were found. The Horn Shelter is considered among the most significant prehistoric finds in North America.

Stepping closer to the present, the Clifton Classic Chassis Auto Museum showcases vintage vehicles for car enthusiasts.

But the city doesn’t dwell on the past. Nationally recognized artists live in and around Clifton, including several members of the Cowboy Artists of America. Merritt Mauzey in 1946 was the first Texan to receive a Guggenheim Foundation fellowship in fine arts.

Clifton has twice been designated as one of the top 100 small art communities in the nation. The Bosque Arts Center is housed in a restored three-story building that was the former Main Hall of Clifton College. Colorful murals downtown are painted on walls along Art Alley.

Speaking of the film arts, the historic Cliftex Theatre is celebrating its 100th anniversary of...
HEART O’ TEXAS FAIR & RODEO

When October rolls around, Central Texans can mark their calendars for the return of the Heart O’ Texas Fair & Rodeo.

The thrill of the rodeo, the sounds of the midway rides and musical performers, and the tantalizing smells of deep-fried ... stuff, is all part of the annual 10-day extravaganza held Oct. 6-15 in and around the Extraco Events Center.

Numerous promotions are offered every day; if you can’t find discounted or free admission you probably aren’t looking very hard.

Mutton bustin’ — youngsters holding onto woolly sheep as if their lives depended on it — remains a fan favorite. Another fixture is the Heart O’ Texas Sweethearts, local high schoolers who help with the fair and rodeo events and also act as ambassadors by volunteering at community events throughout the year.

ADDRESS: 4601 Bosque Blvd.
PHONE: 776-1660
ONLINE: hotfair.com, Facebook page
CAMERON PARK ZOO

If Cameron Park is a jewel in the city of Waco, then the Cameron Park Zoo adds that extra sparkle. The 52-acre zoo within Cameron Park opened in 1993. An earlier, smaller zoo was located near Waco Regional Airport and had opened in 1955.

The zoo features animals from five continents. Gibbon Island displays white-handed gibbons. The Brazos River Country section, added in 2005, includes a 50,000-gallon saltwater aquarium, a large swampland habitat, and other native Texas-type habitats featuring numerous species found within the state.

The herpetarium contains numerous reptiles and amphibians and is a cool, enclosed area.

The African Savanna showcases the zoo’s lions and meerkats. In 2009, the zoo opened the Asian Forest area, expanding its collection to include endangered animals, such as orangutans, Sumatran tigers and Komodo dragons.

Lemur Island, with its ring-tailed lemurs, is a popular attraction.

Grammy Nell’s playground area is popular with young kids and has a splash area for cooling off.
This beautiful and fun map of downtown Waco was created by Shelby Pipken (below) and is included on a brochure being handed out to visitors downtown.

A native of Richardson near Dallas, she is a Baylor University graduate who now calls Waco home. Her passion for watercolor and calligraphy began the summer of 2014 when she purchased her first set of watercolor paints.

In addition to owning Shelby Nickel Designs, she works full time as the director of communications at Four Columns Marketing in downtown Waco.

Shelby’s pieces can be found on Etsy or at www.shelbynickeldesigns.com.
HAWAIIAN FALLS WATER PARK

Hawaiian Falls built its attractions around the city of Waco’s existing pool and children’s water play structure in 2012. Swimming lessons are taught at the facility. Among the popular attractions is the Pineapple Express slide, a large wave pool and lazy river. Hawaiian Falls prides itself on its family-centered approach with a heavy emphasis on safety at the park.

ADDRESS: 900 Lake Shore Drive
PHONE: 892-0222
ONLINE: hfalls.com/waco, Facebook page

EXPLORE THE ARTS

Many opportunities abound to explore the arts around Waco.

The Art Center of Waco, located on the McLennan Community College campus, has exhibits both from local and world-renowned artists, along with art camps and special events.

The Cultural Arts Fest returns Sept. 30-Oct. 2 with many hands-on activities for children throughout Indian Spring Park and in the Waco Convention Center.

Art on Elm is an art exhibition and event held in April that features local artists and musicians.

Doreen Ravenscroft, the founder and executive director of Cultural Arts of Waco, recently announced a nonprofit venture called ArtPlace at 418 Elm Ave., site of a long-vacant movie theater. She envisions it an all-purpose space for children’s and adult art classes, art shows, movie showings and performances.

The Martin Museum of Art at Baylor University has permanent collections and temporary exhibits for patrons to enjoy.

ONLINE: artcenterwaco.org
wacoartsfest.org
Art on Elm Avenue is on Facebook
baylor.edu/martinmuseum
Texans are rightly proud of the state’s famous law enforcement group. Wacoans can be proud that the story of the group’s history is shared in their backyard.

The Texas Ranger Hall of Fame and Museum was designated by the state as the official historical center of the Texas Rangers law enforcement agency. It consists of the Homer Garrison Jr. Gallery, the interactive Texas Ranger Hall of Fame, the Texas Ranger Research Center and the headquarters of Texas Rangers Company F.

The Homer Garrison Jr. Gallery has more than 14,000 artifacts dating back to the founding of the Texas Rangers.

Researchers use the center to research ancestors, write books or produce movies and TV shows. The collections hold more than 300,000 items, including the personal and case files of Texas Rangers.

The museum was founded in 1964. The facility includes Knox Hall, which hosts banquets, weddings, conferences and other gatherings. The hall recently underwent some upgrades.

ADDRESS: 100 Texas Ranger Trail (Take Interstate 35 Exit 335B)
PHONE: 750-8631
ONLINE: texasranger.org

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DOWNTOWN NIGHTLIFE

The downtown Waco scene is becoming revitalized, as more than just the college crowd are exploring what downtown has to offer.

The options are growing, whether it’s a quieter setting such as Klassy Glass, Dichotomy or Barnett’s Pub, to more boisterous locales with live performers at places such as Truelove Bar, Muddle and Halftime.

Most of these night spots are on Austin Avenue or Franklin Avenue, but Backyard Grill and Bar opened last year on Eighth Street next to The Findery and boasts a vibrant outdoor scene, complete with sports broadcasts usually shown on a large wall for viewing and live performances on stage (see photo). The Backyard does have a bar and tables indoors for those wanting to escape a sweltering summer night.

ADDRESS: 300 S. Fifth St.
PHONE: 757-1024
ONLINE: drpeppermuseum.com, Facebook page

DR PEPPER MUSEUM

Technically, the full name is the Dr Pepper Museum and Free Enterprise Institute, but everyone calls it the Dr Pepper Museum.

It is celebrating its 25-year anniversary, and doing it in a big way with an expansion into an 1882-era building across the courtyard from the original structure at 300 S. Fifth St.

The new areas of the East Wing Building provided more space, not just for the Emerson Holt-Ted Getterman Gallery — named for the key businessmen in the Waco soft drink bottling industry — but for several new additions.

In the Holt-Getterman Gallery are old wooden soda wagons, an early 20th-century delivery truck, a simulated 7UP bottling line, a model train setup designed and built by Ted Getterman’s son, Holt, a wall dedicated to Dr Pepper’s sponsorship of NASCAR and IndyCar racing. The Liquid Laboratory gives demonstrations about the science of soft drinks and foods.

And of course, at the end of your visit, you can still get that Dr Pepper float.
Homestead Heritage, a few miles north of Waco off Farm-to-Market Road 933, is a community of Christian families with an agrarian- and artisan-inspired lifestyle that appears similar to the Amish.

About 140 families, totaling around 1,000 people, comprise the Homestead Heritage community, according to its website.

It has two big events that bring in visitors, the annual Sorghum Festival on Labor Day (see photo) and the Homestead Fair held the Friday and Saturday after Thanksgiving.

A craft village on site is open to the public 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday. People are free to tour the grounds and visit the craft shops. Some of the shops offer hands-on craft activities that cost a small fee.

There also is Cafe Homestead, a restaurant that uses all-natural, locally sourced, homegrown ingredients.

ADDRESS: 608 Dry Creek Road.
PHONE: 754-9600
ONLINE: homesteadheritage.com, cafehomestead.com
Waco is fortunate to be home of the Texas Sports Hall of Fame. Geographically, of course, it’s well-suited as a destination among larger cities such as Dallas, Austin and Houston. But Waco wasn’t the Hall’s first home.

The first Hall opened in 1981 in Grand Prairie, but closed five years later. Waco leaders in 1990 made a push to have it moved to Waco and the grand opening was held April 16, 1993.

The Texas Sports Hall of Fame recognizes athletes, coaches and administrators who have made “lasting fame and honor to Texas sports.” It was established in 1951 by the Texas Sports Writers Association and inducted baseball great Tris Speaker, a native of Hubbard, that year. Texas became the first U.S. state to have a sports hall of fame.

More than 300 Texas legends are enshrined in the Hall of Fame, which adds a new class every February.

The building expanded to 35,000 square feet in 2010 with a new banquet hall and the addition of a wing dedicated to the Southwest Conference.

The museum also houses the Texas Tennis Museum and Hall of Fame and Texas High School Football Hall of Fame.

ADDRESS: 1108 S. University Parks Drive.
PHONE: 756-1633
ONLINE: tshof.org

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If you like to watch cars racing around a dirt track, then the Heart O’ Texas Speedway in Elm Mott is for you.

A variety of cars, anywhere from modified to junior mini stock cars and more, compete primarily on Friday nights during the season. The 2016 season, which marks the 50th year for the speedway, began on Feb. 6 and will end Sept. 23 with the Final Points Night.

The Fall Classic is scheduled for Oct. 20-22.

ADDRESS: 784 N. McLennan Drive in Elm Mott
PHONE: 829-2294
ONLINE: heartotexspeedway.com, Facebook page

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Photo by Photos by Debbie

Photo by Rod Aydelotte
WESTFEST

For a real taste of Czech culture, nothing beats the annual Westfest during Labor Day weekend. Westfest was founded in 1976 as a way for the West community to raise funds for a variety of projects. The event salutes the area’s Czech heritage with authentic Czech music, food and dancing.

All activities with the exception of the downtown parade on Saturday morning happen at the West Fair and Rodeo grounds, located one mile south of downtown on South Main Street. Kolache-eating and kolache-baking contests are just two of the events during Westfest.

The Friday night preview party gets the weekend started in a big way with the crowning of Miss Westfest at 7 p.m. This year’s preview party performers are William Clark Green at 8 p.m. and headliner Wade Bowen at 10.

PHONE: 826-5058
ONLINE: westfest.com, Facebook page

ADDRESS: 5347 Old Mexia Road near Axtell
PHONE: 227-6388
ONLINE: bsrcablepark.com, Facebook page

BSR CABLE PARK

When it comes to extreme water sports, it’s hard to beat BSR Cable Park.

A popular spot for the younger crowd, the park is named for the cable system that pulls wakeboarders across the water. But it’s gained popularity since the addition of the giant Royal Flush slide that launches riders high in the air before they land with a big splash.

A video produced by BSR last year went viral in a huge way and has been viewed more than 36 million times on YouTube. A new video showcasing the Royal Flush was released this summer.

For those seeking a more peaceful trip to BSR, the milelong Lazy River is touted as the longest in the world.

A bar and grill is available in the main building that houses the pro shop for those who have worked up an appetite or need to quench their thirst.

ADDRESS: 5347 Old Mexia Road near Axtell
PHONE: 227-6388
ONLINE: bsrcablepark.com, Facebook page

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Reserve your space by October 1, 2016 and receive a 10% discount
Waco has three public golf courses that golfers of any skill level can enjoy.

The city of Waco-owned Cottonwood Creek Golf Course is a popular choice for golfers. It hosts many tournaments from its location at 5200 Bagby Ave.

Twin Rivers Golf Club, 1000 Bear Ridge Drive, sits off U.S. Highway along the banks of the South and Middle Bosque rivers. It is the home course for the Baylor University golf teams, as well the MCC men’s team and Midway High School squads.

Lake Waco Golf Club, 5608 Flat Rock Road, is a semi-private facility open to the public with a limited amount of memberships. It sits on the north side of Lake Waco and has several lakes on the land.

On the north edge of Waco sits Bogey’s Par-3 Golf Course, 5500 W. Old Steinbeck Bend Road. All 18 holes are par-3.

If you want to drive a little farther out of Waco, Mart has Battle Lake Golf Course at 4443 Battle Lake Road.

The city of Waco does a great job with its Brazos Nights concerts.

The first Friday evening in April, May and June a free Brazos Nights concert is held in Indian Spring Park.

Brazos Nights culminates on July 4 with the big Independence Day celebration at Touchdown Alley near McLane Stadium. Fireworks are shot above the Brazos River after sunset while the Waco Community Band plays patriotic music.

Local country artist Wade Bowen has his annual benefit concert in Indian Spring Park in early June.

The cities of Hewitt and Woodway each offer a midweek summer concert series. Hewitt concerts are at the new Creekside Amphitheater in Warren Park and Woodway has its performances at the Carleen Bright Arboretum.

ONLINE: brazosnightswaco.com, Facebook cityofhewitt.com, Facebook woodway-texas.com, Facebook
FLOATING ON THE BRAZOS RIVER

It’s been an odd summer to look out at the Brazos River and not see anything other than ducks on top of the water.

The heavy springtime rains flooded the river and deposited a lot of debris into the Brazos, making it unsafe for boaters, paddleboaters and kayakers.

Most springs and summers, well, even into fall with the warm weather in Central Texas, you’ll find people enjoying the Brazos on kayaks, paddleboards and boats.

During football season, Baylor fans with boats will make their way down river to McLane Stadium to sailgate on game day.

Dragboat races are held in April when the river cooperates, and often in the spring you’ll see competitive rowing teams from universities to our north practicing their skills because the weather is nicer here.

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If you like to play disc golf, Waco is a great place to enjoy the sport, with four championship-level courses in the area.

In fact, Waco hosted the Texas State Disc Golf Championships in early April this year, getting placed in the rotation with Austin and Houston. Unfortunately, the spring rains that inundated the area made their presence known on the back half of the championships, making it less than ideal conditions for the competitors.

Courses of varying degrees of challenges can be found at Cameron Park (23 holes), Brazos Park East (18 holes, known as “The Beast”), Hewitt Park (18 holes) and Woodway Park (18 holes).

The Waco Disc Golf Association, which hosted the state event, has an excellent website with lots of information about the courses, along with printable scorecards.

A nine-hole course at Lorena Middle School is flat and open and is great for beginners.

ONLINE: wacodga.com

WACO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Surely you know that Waco has a symphony orchestra. The upcoming 2016-17 season, which opens Sept. 22 with violinist Andrej Kurti, will be the symphony’s 55th year.

All concerts begin at 7:30 p.m. in Waco Hall on the Baylor campus. Stephen Heyde conducts the symphony.

Five concerts, not counting “The Nutcracker” performance in December, are scheduled for the upcoming season.

Patrons are encouraged to dress comfortably at the concerts, where people will be seen in everything from formal wear to blue jeans (though most of the audience goes with business or business-casual attire).

Worth noting are two other excellent musical groups: the Waco Community Band, which always performs during the Brazos Nights July 4th fireworks show, and the Waco Jazz Orchestra.

ONLINE: wacosymphony.com
wacocommunityband.org
wacojazzorchestra.com
AMTRAK IN MCGREGOR

McGregor has SpaceX nearby, rattling windows whenever it tests its rocket engines. But there’srumbling on the railroad tracks, too, as Amtrak’s Texas Eagle passenger train stops daily at the unmanned depot.

The Texas Eagle is a 1,306-mile route in the central and western United States. Trains run daily between Chicago and San Antonio. As part of the Sunset Limited, Amtrak runs from San Antonio to Los Angeles (2,728 miles) three days a week.

If you’re not in a hurry and would love to watch the passing scenery, read a book or sleep, Amtrak could be the ticket. A word of warning, though, freight trains have priority on the track and Amtrak routinely has to allow them to pass through, which can lengthen the time of a trip. A downloadable app can alert riders to expected arrival times (and delays) at the stations.

ADDRESS: State Highway 317 at First Street (Amtrak Blvd.)
ONLINE: texaseagle.com

WACO LIONS PARK AND KIDDIELAND

Long a popular spot to take the kiddos, the entertainment complex overseen by a board of Lions Club members still has plenty to offer as it marks its 100th anniversary of operation this year.

A Ferris wheel has been added to the attractions, which includes a 55-foot-long miniature train that circumnavigates the park, a carousel, go-carts for the older kids and adults, and putt-putt golf for all ages.

It is open daily during the summer and weekends only when school is in session. Check its Facebook page or its electronic sign at the edge of the park for times.

ADDRESS: 1715 N. 42nd St.
PHONE: 772-3541
ONLINE: Facebook page

WACO DOWNTOWN FARMERS MARKET

The farmers market has proved extremely popular since it opened in November 2011. It is open every Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. year-round as well as 3 to 7 p.m. Tuesdays on a seasonal basis.

Area agricultural producers and artisan vendors within 150 miles of Waco offer a variety of items, even coffee and crepes. The farmers market is in a tree-lined section near the old fire tower and next door to an old RV park.

ADDRESS: 400 S. University Parks Drive
ONLINE: wacodowntownfarmersmarket.com
COVER STORY cont.

32 TONKAWA FALLS IN CRAWFORD

There’s only about three months to enjoy Tonkawa Falls, which only becomes “the falls” when there’s sufficient runoff from up north that flows into Tonk Creek. The springtime rains get it started, but by mid-summer — unless there’s a decent amount of rainfall in June and July — it becomes a trickle and then dries up completely.

It’s a gorgeous setting while the water flowing, and because it’s free, it’s a popular spot for cooling off. Jumping off the adjacent cliffs into the water is popular, but city officials and EMS personnel discourage that because hitting the solid rock at the bottom has led to cuts and broken bones.

ADDRESS: Tonkawa Falls is east of downtown Crawford between Fourth Street and Fifth Street (F.M. 185). Swimmers should park at the football field parking lot on Fourth and enter through a pedestrian gate near the bridge.
PHONE: 254-486-2125 (Chamber of Commerce number)
ONLINE: crawfordchamberofcommerce.com, Tonkawa Falls Facebook page

33 THE LAST DRIVE-IN PICTURE SHOW IN GATESVILLE

Only a little more than a half-hour outside Waco, it feels like a blast from the past: going to a drive-in. And at $10 per car, it’s tough to beat that price.

Most people will set up lawn chairs to sit under the stars for the 9 p.m. first movie of a nightly double-feature and roll down their vehicle’s windows or take a radio to listen to the movie’s audio on 90.3 FM.

The theater offers first-run movies, and if the Central Texas heat is more than you care to deal with, a 174-seat indoor theater is available with other showings earlier in the day. Concessions prices are less than most theaters, too.

An 18-hole miniature golf course on the property hasn’t been used in a few years, but the owner is working to renovate it and make it playable again.

ADDRESS: 2912 State Highway 36 in Gatesville
PHONE: 254-865-8445
ONLINE: drives-ins.com/showing/txlast, Facebook page ★