



SPRING PARNELL



**VAN ZANDT**  
ARTS & CULTURAL DISTRICT



*A variety of sources provided information for this publication including the Texas State Historical Association, County Line Magazine, Van Zandt Genealogy Library, Van Zandt Historical Commission, Edom Historical Society, Van Zandt Newspapers, Van ISD journalism students, and local artists and entrepreneurs. Only a sampling of area historical markers and the many bed and breakfasts and air BnBs in the district are included. Additions to quality-of-life offerings continue to grow.*

Designed by P.A. Geddie

Sincere appreciation to  
Craig D. Blackmon, FAIA  
for his professional photography  
throughout the book.

Front cover image: “Through the Trees” by Spring Parnell,  
Winner, Marty Zewick Artist Award

Back cover image: “Through the Years” by Kerian Massey,  
Artist/Owner, Edom Art Emporium

The logo features a stylized, colorful 'Z' shape composed of various colored brushstrokes (yellow, orange, red, purple, blue, green) and dots, set against a black background. Below the logo, the text 'VAN ZANDT' is written in a large, bold, black, sans-serif font. Underneath that, 'ARTS & CULTURAL DISTRICT' is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. At the bottom of the logo section, 'FOUNDATION' is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font, followed by '2018 — 2022' in a smaller, black, sans-serif font.

**VAN ZANDT**  
ARTS & CULTURAL DISTRICT  
**FOUNDATION**  
2018 — 2022

Van Zandt Arts & Cultural District Foundation formed as a nonprofit in 2018 to help improve quality of life in the southeast corner of Van Zandt County, Texas. Our initial goal was to bring arts programs to the students of Van ISD, a rural school district that includes the communities of Edom, Van, and Ben Wheeler.

Thinking about other ways to improve the district, we looked at the amenities of each of the towns and saw an opportunity to bring them together as a cooperative tourism destination.

Merging arts education with economic development through tourism quickly became the foundation's focus.

One of our first projects was enlisting the Van ISD High School journalism students to photograph and write descriptions of tourism-worthy businesses in the district. Five years later, that list has grown to include an even bigger offering of local art, food, wineries, gardens, shops, and attractions.

Surrounded by a backdrop of nature at its best and unique country lodging and businesses are the art studios of Edom, the rich history of Van, and the lively entertainment of Ben Wheeler. Talented artists, musicians, historians, and entrepreneurs provide authentic rural Texas culture and heritage experiences that enhance quality of life for residents, visitors, and future generations.

VAN ZANDT ARTS & CULTURAL DISTRICT FOUNDATION  
P.O. Box 608 • Ben Wheeler, Texas 75754  
[www.VanZandtACD.com](http://www.VanZandtACD.com)  
(903) 312-9556

VAN ZANDT ARTS & CULTURAL DISTRICT

*Edom, Van, & Ben Wheeler, Texas*



- |                       |                |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| Art Galleries/Pop Ups | Parks          |
| Dining                | Skate Park     |
| Gardens               | Shopping       |
| Golf                  | Special Events |
| History               | Splash Pad     |
| Live Music            | Theatre        |
| Lodging               | Wineries       |

# INSIDE

6

Edom

16

Neches River  
Corridor

22

Van

32

279 Artisans Trail

36

Ben Wheeler

46

Gratitude







# EDOM

Located in the southernmost corner of Van Zandt County, Edom is the place “Where Art Comes to Life.” It has a population of less than 375 people and a majority of those are artists — writers, musicians, actors, potters, painters, photographers, weavers, metal and fiber crafters, and others call Edom home.

The town was established in the mid 1800s. It was a popular stop-over on the Tyler-Porter’s Bluff Road with local saloons filled with lumberjacks, freighters, and traders. The Edom school opened in 1866. By 1914, the town had a cotton gin and four general stores.

Like many rural Texas towns, Edom had its heyday in the years prior to World War II. When the war was over, many moved to larger cities like Dallas to make a living. By 1970, the community no longer had a downtown of any significance. Although a handful of businesses kept their doors open, and a few locals enjoyed an occasional front porch visit along the dusty old main street, Edom was essentially nothing more than a sleepy little spot in the road that locals used to get to their country homes.

The dilapidating buildings along 279 in Edom were an eyesore to many but when potter Doug Brown arrived in 1971, he saw the promise of an artists’ colony. He opened Potters Brown that year in one old building and began fixing it up along with others on the north side of Edom’s main street.

Soon friends Zeke and Marty and many other artists joined him and the Edom Craft Community was born.

The locals didn’t quite know what to make of these new people settling into their town — most young people were still moving away from Edom to earn a living in big cities. The old folks didn’t understand what the small town had to offer the newcomers. And the fact that they were *artists* made them even more suspicious.

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Ancient Dreams (opposite page), 2012, Zeke & Marty. Madagascar Ammonite set in sterling and 14k gold, stones are Peridot, padparadscha sapphire and golden citrine, with a malaya garnet set in sterling hanging below. Potters Brown (top right) began in 1971 and continues today with a new generation of artists as Potters Brown Collective. The late Doug Brown (bottom right) founded the Edom artists colony.



PHOTO BY CRAIG D. BLACKMON, FALA



PHOTO BY TOM GRADDE





As the locals started going into Potters Brown and seeing there was nothing fishy going on, they still didn't understand how anyone could make a living "playing in the mud," but little by little they grew to accept and appreciate their new creative neighbors.

Some of the locals were actually artists themselves and "came out of the backwoods" to find kindred spirits to work with in downtown Edom. Between the newcomers and the long-time locals, the artists' colony took hold and continues today.

On any given day, downtown Edom is bustling with working artists, gallery shows, classes and workshops, and numerous special events take place throughout the year. While Doug Brown passed away in 2020, his legacy continues.

Folks in downtown Edom sit on porches and enjoy visiting with their neighbors and watching travelers slowly approach the only

light in town. There's ample parking within easy reach of the galleries and working studios where more than 50 artists are represented. Live music takes place weekly with art shows sprinkled in on a regular basis. During the summer, there's an abundance of blueberries for picking off the vines or purchasing at a rustic general store. Edom is a perfect mix of laid-back simplicity with a creative energy that keeps things colorfully hopping.

## Edom Art Festival

Just a year after starting the Edom Craft Community, Potters Brown became home base for the Edom Art Festival that brings an even bigger surge to the local economy for two days each year.

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The Edom Art Festival (above) began in 1972 and continues today bringing 10,000 people to town one weekend each year. Potters Brown (opposite page) was started by the late Doug Brown in 1971 and he and his wife Beth created pottery there for many years. The studio is continuing his legacy with local artists under the name Potters Brown Collective.



In the last 50 years, the crowds have swelled to more than 10,000 during the two-day event each October, bringing thousands of dollars to the local economy. It is one of the most successful art shows in the state, and it is artist-produced by the Edom Craft Community.

Aside from the artists who set up shop, hundreds of visiting artists found their way to Edom through the festival, and an estimated half a million people visited one or more times over the last few decades. [www.EdomArts.com](http://www.EdomArts.com)

Other annual events in Edom included Berry Picking in June and July and holiday celebrations.

## The Shed Cafe

A favorite home-cooking, rustic-ambience getaway dining experience for people all over Texas for half a century, The Shed Cafe took a hit during the pandemic and is temporarily closed. Locals and thousands of frequent visitors over the years are waiting for the time when they can once again, “Get Fed at the Shed.”

## Sisters

Visitors to Edom can’t miss the bright pink house adjacent to The Shed parking lot where they find fun and eclectic gifts, garden whimsy, snow cones, and unique estate sale finds.

## Arbor Castle Birdhouses

Joseph Hopps builds what he calls “houses for homeless birds.” The handcrafted birdhouses use materials including copper, hand-sawn wood, glass, and other fascinating mediums. The store also features carvings, jewelry, wind chimes, and other creations by local artists. Visitors often catch Joe building his creations in his studio adjacent to his store. [www.arborcastle-birdhouses.com](http://www.arborcastle-birdhouses.com)

## Hip Horticulture

Plant art and design by Shanna Wiggins includes found objects converted into planters. Classes and workshops are offered for all ages. The store specializes in succulents and cacti, vintage planters, handmade pottery, and 3D artist-designed planters.



PHOTOS BY TOM GEDDIE



## Potters Brown Collective

A continuation of the original Potters Brown studio that began in 1971, Potters Brown Collective is run by local artists and features beautiful art by talented potters in the region. The next generation of artists is beginning to establish residency to carry on the legacy of what Doug Brown started and a few of his rare pieces are still found on the shelves.

## Potters Brown State Historical Marker

Application with Texas Historical Commission

## Edom Art Emporium

Owners Julie Howard and Kerian Massey showcase a fabulous collection of fine art ranging from paintings, pottery, jewelry, metal work, charcoal, and pastels. [www.edomartemporium.com](http://www.edomartemporium.com)

## Zeke & Marty

One of the original founders of the 1970s arts movement in Edom, this gallery sports one-of-a-kind art jewelry by Zeke and the late Marty Zewick. Creations are new and modern or a re-

purposed old piece of jewelry refashioned into a stunning new piece. Zeke is often found creating beautiful pieces in his onsite studio. [www.zekeandmarty.com](http://www.zekeandmarty.com)

## Cade Republic

Owner and creator Vanessa Price focuses on achieving balance and wellness within the home. Her vast skill set allows her to share her knowledge of interior design on network TV (HGTV) and she is available for consultation by appointment in downtown Edom. Vanessa helps people create their own home or office sanctuary.

## The Old Firehouse

This multi-purpose venue features photography, live music, local art, and custom framing. Owner Jeff Gottesman holds a music series each year in a listening room environment bringing touring Americana singer-songwriters to Edom. [www.the-oldfirehouse.net](http://www.the-oldfirehouse.net)

## Edom Cemetery

In this historic burial ground of more than 1,500 sites rest many





PHOTO BY CRAIG D. BLACKMON, FMAA

of Van Zandt County’s early pioneers and their descendants. The oldest grave is that of pioneer William Featherston who was interred in 1857. There are multiple grave markers of “unknown” people in Edom Cemetery and four of them are together in the northern section.

### **Red Bird Kitchen**

Menu includes authentic Mexican and Southern comfort foods.

### **Edom Log Cabin Cafe**

Coming soon featuring Chef Hobbles’ artful cuisine.

### **Shaggy Shack**

The first food truck in downtown Edom serves locally recommended street tacos and regional dishes by native Edomite Shane Flowers.

### **Edom Historical Museum**

Established in 1995, the museum sports donated relics dating back to the Texas/Indian war and other local history and the Edom Historical Society is in the process of adding history of

the Edom Craft Community as it celebrates 50 years. [www.facebook.com/edomhistoricalsocietymuseum/](http://www.facebook.com/edomhistoricalsocietymuseum/)

### **HISTORICAL MARKER City of Edom**

According to available records the town of Edom has occupied three different locations and is the third oldest town in Van Zandt County. James Coltharp and A. C. Beall settled six miles east of here in 1849, built a sawmill, and named the town Hamburg. A stagecoach station and post office were established. The town shifted 6 miles west to a crossroads and was called Newburg. In the 1850s the town moved to its present location and became Edom. A church was organized in 1857, and a new post office opened in 1858. Edom was incorporated in 1966.

### **MUSEUM YARD Coltharp Green Grist Millstone**

In 1860, James Coltharp established a mill place on the upper reaches of Tonkawa Creek, also known as Candy Branch, in the edge of Henderson County, making flower and cornmeal.



It was about halfway between Edom and what was to become Chandler. He operated a sawmill, a carding machine and a gristmill which soon became known as “one of the finest mills in the state.”

He named this place Tyron Mills, but it was often called Coltharp’s Mills during the Civil War. The mill operated 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in order to keep up with demand. He shipped flour and cornmeal as far east as Shreveport and as far west as Fort Worth.

When Coltharp died in 1872, his son Bruce inherited the sawmill and son-in-law William Green received the gristmill, which he moved to Kickapoo Creek near the mouth of Tonkawa Creek. That place became known as Green Mill Crossing. It was on the road from Edom through Chandler to Larissa in Northwest Cherokee County.

Just when the mill ceased operation is unknown. This stone is one of the stones used in that gristmill. It was recovered from the bottom of Kickapoo Creek a number of years ago by Ken-

neth L. Kidd with help [from] Raymond Kidd and Newman Herrington.

## **My Checkered Past**

This unique shop sports an eclectic mix of estate sale finds, oddities, collections of the past, and fun items for the home. Owner Kat Nipp has an eye for found objects desired by collectors and shoppers lured in by funky junkie.

## **Tree of Knowledge**

A huge sweet gum tree sits on the east side of My Checkered Past. This tree is called the “Tree of Knowledge” because of the gatherings of men playing dominos taking place under the branches during the 1950s and 60s.

## **Thistle Room**

Located inside the old Experience building, K.T. and Emmett Ahumada say their holistic and metaphysical store has something for everyone. The Thistle Room’s organic homemade products include soaps, loose leaf teas, herb bundles, and soy candles.





PHOTO BY CRAIG D. BLACKMON, FAIA

## **Blueberry Hill Farms**

Annual berry picking brings thousands of visitors each summer season to Edom. Guests can pick their own or purchase inside a delightful country store with jams, jellies, homemade ice cream, pastries, and many other hand-baked items are found at this delicious location that's a destination all its own. Owners Chuck and Sherry Arena are known to eat the berries right off the bush like most of their visitors. [www.blueberryhillfarms.com](http://www.blueberryhillfarms.com)

## **Blueberry Farmhouse**

AirBnB. Chuck Arena. Located on a blueberry farm between Edom and Ben Wheeler. [www.airbnb.com/rooms/21242130](http://www.airbnb.com/rooms/21242130)

## **Big Chicken Daylily Farm**

## **C.W. Morris Cotton Gin**

As was the case in so many small Texas towns in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the cotton gin in Edom was a major element in the economy. First opened at this site in 1918 by Ro Dike, who moved his ginning operation here from Davidson (3 mi. W), the gin was owned and operated by local merchant

C.W. Morris beginning in 1924. For approximately 4 months in the late summer and early fall, most activities revolved around ginning. Some 700 to 800 farmers depended on the local cotton gin. In peak season the gin was known to operate 24 hours a day. The original Continental Gin Company machinery burned in 1929 and was replaced with modern diesel-powered equipment manufactured by the Murray Gin Company. During the 1930s the gin processed an average of 3 to 4 bales of cotton per hour. The gin shut down about 1946.

## **Edom Community Center and Park**

The former Edom schoolhouse is now a community center and home to the local community theatre group that presents several shows each year. It's a favorite local site for family reunions and other events and the park area features a walking trail, baseball field, and space for skateboarding and other activities.

## **Edom Volunteer Fire Department**

This active volunteer fire department holds several fundraisers each year including community holiday events.



PHOTO BY CRAIG D. BLACKMON, FAIA





## Blackmon Art Studio

Art partners Craig and Jan Blackmon design and fabricate metal sculptures for residential, commercial, and public clients using found metal artifacts, repurposed into art. The registered architects collaborate to create both large and small scale custom framed art photography, steel sculptures, fire pits, furniture, wall art, and accessories. [www.blackmonart.com](http://www.blackmonart.com)

## Wood Haven Cabins

Hand-built cedar cabins nestled in the tall pines welcome guests throughout the year for fishing, relaxing, nature, hiking, cook-outs, getaways, and family reunions. Five cabins are available for relaxation and enjoyment. [www.woodhavencabins.com](http://www.woodhavencabins.com)

## Terra Sana Farm

Terra Sana Farm is a high quality local food producer specializing in local vegetables, microgreens, edible flowers, and gourmet lettuces. They have a fig orchard with several unique varieties from all over the world. Terra Sana means “healthy earth” in Italian. [www.terrasanafarm.com](http://www.terrasanafarm.com)

## Mariposa Cabin

The vacation rental Mariposa Cabin is nestled in the woods just past the beautiful Blue Moon Gardens. The hand-crafted one-bedroom cottage is ideal for some peace and quiet and short hikes on 80 acres of nature’s best. Explore Mariposa at [vrbo.com/354940](http://vrbo.com/354940).

## Blue Moon Gardens

A delightful oasis destination garden center built on a rural homestead, Blue Moon Gardens features more than 20 demonstration gardens, an old farmhouse gift shop, an outdoor kitchen, a huge selection of plants, and a fiber arts studio. [www.bluemoongardens.com](http://www.bluemoongardens.com)

## Green Goat Winery & Vineyards

Lovely vineyards and serving lodge with indoor and outdoor seating. [www.greengoatwinery.com](http://www.greengoatwinery.com)

## Southern Comfort in the Piney Woods

Colonial home AirBnB. on 87 acres with clear spring fed lake. [www.airbnb.com/rooms/27133301](http://www.airbnb.com/rooms/27133301)





PHOTO BY P.A. GEDDIE



# NECHES RIVER CORRIDOR

The head of the Neches River rises in the middle of a field in the Colfax community. It snakes its way 416 miles or so down to the Texas coast, passing Port Neches and flowing under the Rainbow Bridge into Sabine Lake just before merging with the Gulf of Mexico.

## Rhine Lake

In the late 1930s Pure Oil Company dammed the Neches River creating Rhine Lake, or as it's known locally, Pure Oil Lake. The 450-acre lake served as a water source for the Van oil fields as well as a recreational site for oilfield employees and their families. On January 1, 2008, the dam broke and to Chevron Oil Company's surprise — through a series of company acquirers over the years — they found out they had water rights ownership of this little gem.

Still home to just about 20 families, Chevron agreed to fix the dam if an association was formed to take ownership. Fishing next to the FM 773 bridge on the Neches River is a right of passage for decades of locals here.

## Broken Heart Ranch

An equine facility with indoor and outdoor arenas available for clinics, events, and shows. There's a bunkhouse for overnight guests, RV hookups, a banquet room and dance hall, and plenty of parking space for trailers. [www.brokenheartranchvantx.com](http://www.brokenheartranchvantx.com)

## Garden Valley Golf Resort

Features an 18-hole Dogwood Golf Course, clubhouse with dining, pro shop, meeting rooms, outdoor terrace, and special event facilities. Lodging available in stylishly rustic cottages and cabins with varying decor and capacity for groups. [www.garden-valleytx.com](http://www.garden-valleytx.com)

## Texas Rose Horse Park

Event facility focused on equestrian shows and other special events. [www.texasrosehorsepark.com](http://www.texasrosehorsepark.com)



ART BY RANDOLPH MARTIN. PHOTO BY CRAIG D. BLACKMON, FALA

## Chief Bowles & Battle of the Neches

The Neches River serves as a boundary line between Van Zandt and Smith counties. Long before those lines were drawn, humans found sustenance near its waters and surrounding thick groves of oak trees. The long years of wars between the Native Indians, Europeans, Spaniards, French, and Mexicans claiming ownership of Texas undoubtedly crossed paths with the upper branches of the Neches River and the story of one significant battle is captured in our written history.

In early 1820, Chief Duwali Bowles led some 60 Cherokee families into Texas fleeing battles in Arkansas for land. They settled in East Texas and carved out farms on land that belonged to their friends, the Caddos. Chief Bowles — also known as Diwal'li, Chief Bowl, Colonel Bowles, Bold Hunter, and the Bowl — was born in North Carolina around 1756, the son of a Scottish father and a full-blooded Cherokee mother. He became the principal chief of the Texas Cherokees.

As more Anglos moved into the region, distrust developed with each culture feeling its security threatened by the other and they were also caught in conflicts between the Texas government and the Mexicans.

In 1832, U.S. House Representative Sam Houston settled in Texas and became the top-ranking official in the Texan Army, leading the decisive battle in Texas' war for independence against Mexico. He then was elected as the first president of the Republic of Texas in 1836.

Sam Houston had great sympathies for the Indians having spent three years living with Cherokees as a young man; they gave him the name Raven.

Houston was sent to council with the East Texas Cherokees in the fall of 1835 and in November that year pledged to recognize their land claims. On February 23, 1836, the Cherokees and Texans signed a treaty. At the signing of the treaty, General Houston presented a sword to Chief Bowles along with a military hat, a silk vest and a red sash. The agreement established an expansive reservation for the Cherokees. Although it consid-



Artwork above by Paige Bridges shows interpretation of Cherokee Chief Bowles. Below is "The Treaty," a bronze sculpture in Nacogdoches Michael Boyett showing Sam Houston and Chief Bowles making a deal that was not upheld after Houston left office.





erably reduced their former landholdings, the Cherokees agree to the accord because they believed it finally gave them a permanent home. The reservation included land along the Neches River in what is now identified as the southeast corner of Van Zandt County.

Sam Houston's term limit expired in 1838 and he was succeeded by Mirabeau B. Lamar. More Anglos continued to move into the East Texas region and tensions continued to rise between the two cultures. Lamar wanted the Cherokees removed from Texas and sent troops. The Texas Cherokees decided to fight for their land. In the summer of 1839, a force of several hundred Cherokees led by Chief Bowles met Texas forces in the Battle of the Neches. At dusk on July 16 Chief Bowles and his troops — including Cherokees, Delawares, Shawnees, and other allies — battled the Texas militia soldiers along the Neches River.

Now 83 years old, Chief Bowles entered the battle on horseback, but when his mount was wounded and he was shot through the thigh, he dismounted. After being wounded again, he sat on the battlefield where a Texan soldier shot him in the head.

About 100 members of 13 tribes died in this last battle between the Cherokees and Texans. Others claim the losses were much higher. After the defeat of the tribes, most of the survivors fled to Indian Territory in Oklahoma.

When killed, Chief Bowles carried the sword given him by Sam Houston. It was retrieved and eventually made its way to the Cherokee Masonic Lodge in Tahlequah, Oklahoma.

There's a state marker on Interstate 20 some 15 miles north commemorating the Battle of the Neches. Where Chief Bowles was killed, the State of Texas erected a monument. The land there is now owned and managed by the American Indian Cultural Society (AICS). Each year on the Saturday closest to July 16, a ceremony is held honoring those who died in the battle. One year, AICS members were able to borrow the sword from the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma, making it a full circle memorial ceremony. It is accessible now by hiking in a quarter mile or so on foot. [www.aics1839.com](http://www.aics1839.com)



PHOTO BY INE BURKE



Cherokee Almanac  
Chief Bowles & Battle of the Neches  
<https://bit.ly/37Evskc>



PHOTO BY INE BURKE





## Roseland Plantation

Burwell Hambrick bought a tract of 500 acres of land lying just west of the Neches River in the southeastern portion of Van Zandt County in 1852. He built a pretentious old Greek Revival styled two-story colonial home. He bought more land in the vicinity until he possessed quite a large estate. Most of the land was deeded over to his former slaves after the Civil War and Hambrick died in poverty circa 1869. Future owners of the house over the decades included several descendants of Hambrick's slaves.

Now a recorded Texas Historic Landmark, the home and surrounding property is owned by Tim and Carolyn West. Included are 15 acres of manicured land surrounded by East Texas woods. The main house is furnished in period antiques. It is said to have ghosts, but that doesn't stop the exquisite afternoon tea parties throughout the year. Cherokee Rose Log Cabin is available for rent. Also on the grounds is an antique shop, a chapel and ballroom used for weddings, and a viewing of a replica oil-on-canvas painting of Leonardo Di Vinci's "The Last Supper" that is 15 feet tall by 28 feet wide.

Special events sometimes take place on the grounds with descendants of former slaves and a couple of years ago people from all over the country attended a reunion at Roseland to learn about their ancestral heritage on that land and meet extended family. They spoke of the need for educating all on this important history and shared the African word Sankofa, which means "wisdom in learning from the past ensures a strong future." [www.roselandplantation.com](http://www.roselandplantation.com)

## Redland Community

"It's home" say descendants of former slave Peter Hill who was given land by his captor Burwell Hambrick after the Civil War and Emancipation Proclamation granted him freedom. Peter and other former slaves bought more land over the years and developed their own community they named Redland, for the deep red soil of the area. They built churches, a school, baseball fields, and became a close-knit community that continues today and gave birth to talented people who became doctors, teachers, preachers, construction workers, electricians, and musicians.



Read more in an interview with one of Peter’s descendants in “Redland Freedom” [www.countylinemagazine.com](http://www.countylinemagazine.com).

## Tyler Fish Farms

Fish hatchery helping pond and lake owners grow and sustain trophy fish. [www.tylerfishfarm.com](http://www.tylerfishfarm.com)

## Pelle Legna Winery

Pelle Legna is a vineyard and winery with 100 percent estate-grown and hand-crafted wines located on the Rio Neches Ranch. They grow and nurture vines of Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Merlot, Zinfandel, Cab Franc, Sangiovese, Mourvèdre, Malbec, Grenache, Pinot Noir, Pinot Grigio, Sauvignon Blanc, Petite Sirah and Muscato. The winery is open for tours and tastings by appointment and holds a monthly “Festa” with live music, food, and wine in their Arena Bar. Pelle Legna wines are sold in Tyler, Dallas, College Station, Longview, and in Ben Wheeler at Vintage Cork. [www.pellelegna.com](http://www.pellelegna.com)

## Dragonhead Retreat

Dragonhead Retreat is a unique lodging venue atop 25 wooded acres with amazing views of the countryside and features “art and nature at every turn.” [www.dragonheadretreat.com](http://www.dragonheadretreat.com)

## King Country Lake Cabin

Cabin sitting on 10 acre lake and 35 acres of forested country. [www.airbnb.com/rooms/24753117](http://www.airbnb.com/rooms/24753117)

## Frontier Red Hill Cemetery

The first grave here was that of 19-year-old Elizabeth Carolina Piles, who died May 4, 1856. Buried nearby are her sister Melissa, who died two days later, and her father John Piles (1802-57), on whose land the cemetery was located. Included among the 188 graves here are those of six Confederate veterans and numerous baby-sized tombs.

## The Reserve RV Park

[www.thereservervpark.godaddysites.com](http://www.thereservervpark.godaddysites.com)

## Buffalo Creek Trap Club

## Jordan’s Appliance, Cafe, and Convenience Store

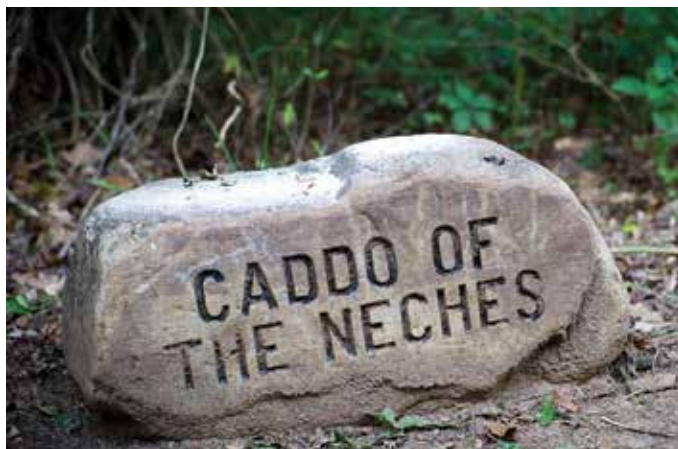
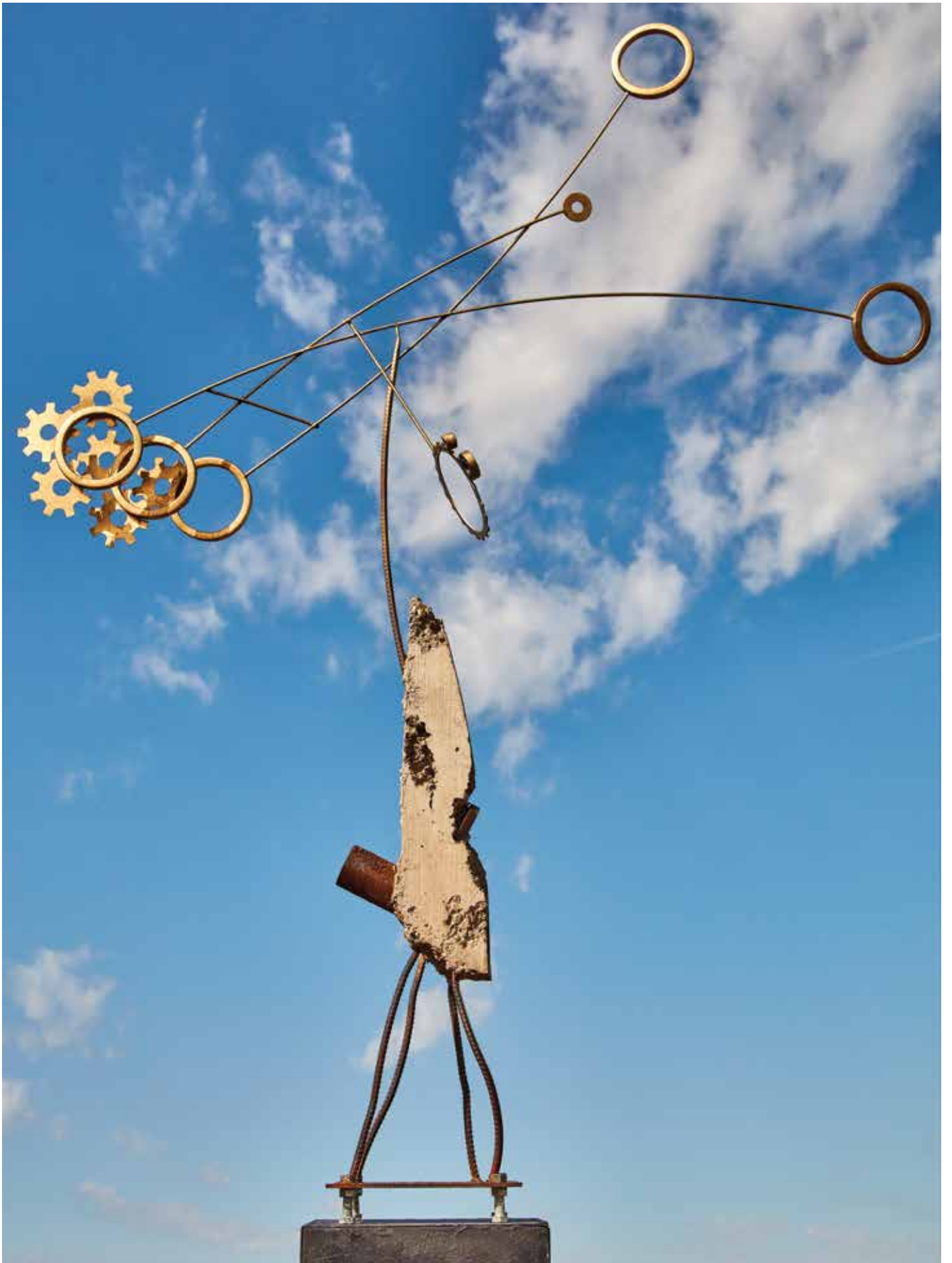


PHOTO BY WESTLEY JONES





# VAN

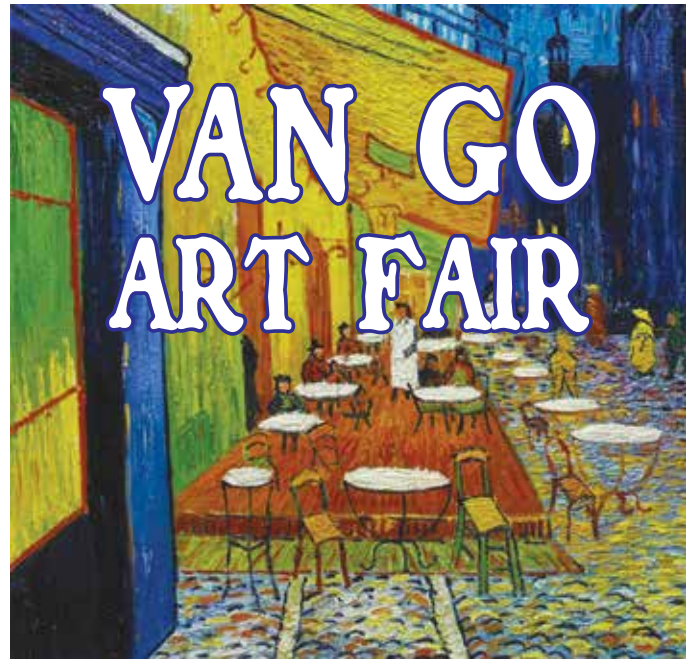
The history of Van comes with some interesting names for the town prior to settling on honoring the postmaster Henry Vance and possibly early community resident Vannie Tunnell. Ratty Towns, Who'd-A-Thought-It, and Swindall are some of its previous monikers. By the 1920s, it was a rural farming community with a small school, post office, general store, and a few small houses that had seen better days.

In 1927, Pure Oil Company's geological department found topography with erratic dips and surface faulting in the southeast part of Van Zandt County, an indication of oil nearby. The appearance of an uplift with its highest point was in the town of Van. The hunt was on and in October 1929 oil was discovered in the back cotton patch of W.T. and Miranda Jarman's property and the first of many derricks was erected. Within a year 180 wells were drilled, not one of them a dry hole.

As Van was deemed a find of major significance it became a boomtown. Pure Oil built a camp site and soon the roads in Van were clogged with incoming trucks and automobiles. Tents and rough board shacks sprang up. Dance halls opened. Beds in the primitive, crowded "hotels" were going for \$4 a night. More than 40 "joints" opened to feed the crowds.

Union Oil Company of California purchased Pure Oil Company properties in the Van field in 1965. Some oil production continues today, but the boomtown is long gone. Today, it's a typical one-stop light town with families who appreciate quality education, high school football games, and small businesses that keep the community going.

The spirit of the people of Van was severely tested on Mother's Day, Sunday, May 10, 2015, when it was hit by an EF-3 tornado killing two people and hospitalizing dozens of others. An estimated 30 percent of the city was damaged by the storms including one of the schools and numerous neighborhoods. First responders came from a 100-mile radius and went door to door searching for injured victims. Shelters were quickly set up in area churches for people who lost their homes. Wander-



ing pets were rescued and taken to shelters waiting to reunite with their humans. Collections of precious photos and family memorabilia found miles away began to accumulate in hopes people would gratefully claim them. In the weeks and months to come, an enormous amount of clothing, household items, and other generous donations came from supportive people from surrounding towns, but none stepped up more than the Van citizens. The community’s resilience and eagerness to help each other brought them through years of cleanup and rebuilding.

Just two years later, the City of Van’s focus on economical stability helped bring Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott to its Interstate 20 entrance. In 2021, phase one of the new McMillan Park was completed, and plans are in place for future development in town and along the interstate. While Van’s downtown today doesn’t have the bustling vibe of its oil boom history, there are several unique businesses that have kept the lights on for many years and a new Speakeasy-style venue is set to open soon that brings at least one aspect of the old glory days full circle.

To learn more about the Jarman family and Van, search “Struck Oil” in *County Line Magazine*, [www.countylinemagazine.com](http://www.countylinemagazine.com).

## Van Oil Festival - October

A celebration of the community’s oil history with a car show, food, fun, and museum tour.

## Freedom Boom

Annual concert and fireworks held in McMillan Park for Independence Day the last Saturday in June.

## Van Go Art Fair - March

Kicking off on Vincent Van Gogh’s 166th birthday on March 30, 2019, this event featured a juried art show with live music, local foods and wines, youth projects, and a costume contest. On hold since the pandemic of 2020, talks of a resurrection are in the works. [www.vangoartfair.com](http://www.vangoartfair.com)

## Tudor Homes of Van

Tudor style homes in Van built during the town’s 1930s oil boom days remain today. They still line the main streets in contrast with the remodeled old farm houses that preceded them.

## Art by Randolph W. Martin

Artist Randy Martin creates exquisite metal sculptures. Search





“Moving Figures” on [www.countylinemagazine.com](http://www.countylinemagazine.com) to learn much more about his work and visit his site [www.artbyrandolphwmartin.com](http://www.artbyrandolphwmartin.com).

## Van City Park

Playground, covered picnic area, splash pad, skate park, rest-rooms.

## Jarman No. 1 Historical Marker

The Pure Oil Company conducted seismograph surveys in Van Zandt County in 1927 and that summer leased about 17,000 acres in the Van area for exploration. Core drilling began in January 1929, and the first derrick was erected in a cotton patch on the farm of W.T. Jarman (1856-1928).

The flurry of activity in the area brought many curious on-lookers. Families brought picnic lunches and spent entire days watching the drilling crews. On October 13 thousands of people came and waited all day, leaving that evening disappointed that nothing had happened. Early on the morning of October 14 the Number One Well quietly came in, launching the village of Van into a boomtown overnight.

In 1929 Van was a small farming community, with a general store and a two-room school. Suddenly stores, hotels, and dance halls sprung up throughout the town, and new schools and roads were built to serve the increased population.

The Jarman Number One Well was the first of 591 wells in the Van field. In the first 20 years, more than 200 million barrels of oil were produced, and in December 1985 the field yielded its 500 millionth barrel of oil.

## Van Area Oil & Historical Museum

Part of the Van Camp Site built by Pure Oil Company in 1929 was the “Cook Warehouse,” used for storing materials for drilling, completion and operations of the wells. Many a tale, handshake, and hello were extended through the big doors of that warehouse. It served the oil field well from January 1930 until February 1966 at which time an era ended. The Cook warehouse was ultimately sold to the City of Van and it lay empty for a number of years. In 1971 Luther and Dorothy Davis reno-



ART BY SHARON GILCHRIST





vated the inside of the building and opened a restaurant called the Woodbine Inn. It served Van and the surrounding area until 1982. Several other restaurants opened and closed after a short time and once again the building was empty.

In 1986 a group of area citizens met and discussed recovering “The Era” by starting a museum. Armed with a 99 year lease from the City of Van on the Cook warehouse, a lot of determination and no money, the Van Area Oil & Historical Museum was born and incorporated June 30, 1987. Open on Saturdays only at this time, the museum houses displays such as an old workable corn sheller, sewing machine, postal equipment, surveying equipment, a small working replica of an oil field pumping unit, various types of farm equipment, an old fire truck, all types of oil field tools from wrenches to wooden sucker rods, various household items such as WWII rations books and numerous other items of interest. [www.facebook.com/VanMuseumTx](http://www.facebook.com/VanMuseumTx)

### **Log Cabin**

A late 1800’s log cabin discovered within the walls of an old house that was being torn down now sits on the grounds of the Van Oil & Historical Museum.

### **Hilliard Hardware**

This woman-owned and operated hardware store is filled to the brim with most anything one needs to build, fix, or tear things apart. The mostly female employees are not only the town’s go-to experts in locating what they need, but in telling them how to use it as well.

### **Van Movie House**

Built in 1946, this landmark served as a movie theater for many years. Refurbished in 2015, it is now available for rentals and is often used for Van special events.

### **Downtown Van**

Many of the buildings in downtown Van today are what’s left behind from the oil boom days of the 1930s. A hodgepodge of styles, city leaders and individuals hope to revitalize in the coming years and provide a nice town center for people to gather.





### **Dinner Bell**

A local favorite, the Dinner Bell is open seven days a week. Known for its country breakfasts, chicken fried steak and fresh veggie sides, and the Texas Size Dinner Bell Deluxe, a gigantic one pound patty burger on a 12-inch bun. Residents and visitors alike look forward to the Dinner Bell's elaborate holiday decorations both inside and outside its doors.

### **3 Knocks Speakeasy Bar & Bistro**

Coming soon.

### **Clean Brew**

A combination coffee shop and laundry mat, Clean Brew is a local favorite, tucked in to a quiet neighborhood off the beaten path. Open Monday through Saturday, they serve locally roasted fair trade coffees, made-from-scratch muffins, kolaches, and waffle cones, and paninis. Their coffee and panini sauces are made fresh in house and include organic mint leaves, cane sugar, Haitian Vanilla, and natural unsweetened cocoa. [www.thecleanbrew.com](http://www.thecleanbrew.com)

### **Van Athletic Park**

Holding center stage here is Van Memorial Stadium with a seating capacity of 5,400. The football field is named for Mal Fowler, an all-state running back for Van High School who later served his alma mater as head football coach for more than 30 years. His son, Todd Fowler, also played for Van and then went on to become a tight end for the Dallas Cowboys. The field is surrounded by a track used for school activities as well as walkers and runners in the community. There's a scoreboard, press box, two ticket booths, restrooms, and concession stand. Also in the complex is a softball field and tennis courts.

### **Sky Ranch**

Open since 1978, Sky Ranch is a Christian-based recreational facility offering kids' camps, family weekend programs, group retreats, and conferences. Rodeo clinics are led by World Champion Steer Wrestler Rope Myers. They have more than 30 individual cabins and lodges, some of which accommodate up to 80 guests, wide-open fields, and a private 90-acre lake. [www.skyranch.org](http://www.skyranch.org)

## Red Moon Farm

Justin and Jessica Bullock operate this 38-acre sustainable agriculture farm, providing chemical-free food through their Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program and local farmers' markets. [www.redmoonfarmtx.com](http://www.redmoonfarmtx.com)

## 1514 Farms

Farm fresh, pasture raised, organic poultry. [www.1514farms.com](http://www.1514farms.com)

## Bouquets & Bows

Gift shop, home decor, and florist. [www.facebook.com/bouquetsandbows](http://www.facebook.com/bouquetsandbows)

## Historic Van School Buildings

The discovery of the Van oil field in 1929 brought about many changes within the community, including an influx of school-

aged children that required the transition from a five-room rural school to a large, ultra-modern school campus. While other Texas schools were forced to make budget cuts because of the depression and later World War II, oil revenues enabled the Van schools to expand rapidly. The 1929-1930 school year began with 90 pupils, but the start of the 1930-1931 brought 611 students. In the summer of 1930 a gymnasium was built and was originally used as a temporary high school. By the start of the 1931-1932 school year, a brick elementary school and a brick high school were ready for use.

The temporary high school was converted back to a gymnasium after the completion of the permanent high school. The Pure Oil Company allowed the school to tap into its water lines free of charge, allowed the school to heat its buildings with gas from the gasoline plant, and also donated \$12,500 to the school district to help with expansion costs. A teachers' home



ART BY RANDOLPH MARTIN. PHOTO BY CRAIG D. BLACKMON, EALA



was constructed in 1930 and was meant to entice the best available teachers to work within the district. It stands today as the school's administration building.

Edom and Ben Wheeler schools consolidated with Van ISD in 1966.

On the opposite end of the original complex is an auditorium used for theatre and other events and is shared by the elementary and intermediate schools.

The old gymnasium was destroyed in the tornado of 2015. Part of the wooden floor was salvaged and is now displayed on the High School gymnasium wall.

The auditorium, elementary school, and administration building were refurbished after the 2015 tornado.

## **McMillan Park**

This new 39-acre park includes disc golf course, walking trail, a three-acre pond with kayak launch, a state-of-the-art playground, covered picnic area, and bathrooms.

## **Van Community Library**

Open Monday through Friday from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m., the Van Community Library has served the district for almost 20 years. Reading programs and Story Time take place for children of all ages throughout the year. Members of the community volunteer to read to kids and provide educational and entertaining presentations.

## **Valle Della Pace Vineyards & Winery**

Italian for Valley of the Peace, Valle Della Pace is a family owned vineyard and winery open Wednesday through Saturday. [www.valledellapace.com](http://www.valledellapace.com)

## **Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott/Van**

Contemporary merges with rural in this 74-room hotel managed by Love's Hospitality. It's pet friendly and amenities include an indoor swimming pool, an exercise room, complimentary Wi-Fi, and an office center.





## The Finish Line

Fairfield Inn & Suites hotel bar with indoor and outside patio seating. Open daily 5-9 p.m.

## Love's Travel Centers

Double the love greets travelers entering Van from Interstate 20 on FM 314 with a facility on each side of the road. Besides fuel, the original store has 40 truck-parking spaces, a truck tire care center, and Carl's Jr restaurant. The second location added 12,000 square feet with an Arby's, Godfather's Pizza, and Chester's dining choices, 74 truck-parking spaces, and a small dog park. Both stores are open 24 hours, seven days a week.

## The Farmhouse Restaurant

Offering Southern comfort food Monday through Saturday, the restaurant specializes in homemade pies and two unique dining rooms. One is a 1920s barn rebuilt into the building with original crib doors. On the opposite side is the "farmhouse" from which the restaurant gets its name. [www.thefarmhousevantx.com](http://www.thefarmhousevantx.com)

## Historical Marker

### The Free State of Van Zandt

Pioneer nickname appropriate to this area's many freedoms — particularly from want and fear. According to tradition, Van Zandt County (created 1848) also by a legal accident had freedom from sharing debts of its parent county, Henderson, and was proud of that unusual advantage. When Texas in 1845 voted to become a part of the United States, such movements as "The Free State of Van Zandt" soon lost force.

## Historical Marker

### Brady P. Gentry

A man whose public service was of highest order, Brady P. Gentry was born on a farm in Colfax. He was educated at Cumberland University (Tennessee) and Tyler Commercial College, and was County Attorney and County Judge of Smith County. As chairman of Texas Highway Commission, 1939-1945, he traveled almost every Texas highway to learn road needs of the state and he aided long-range financial strength of the highway program by supporting the reservation of road-use revenue for road building.





An authority of highway policy, Gentry served in 1943 as president of the American Association of State Highway Officials. In that capacity he aided post-war expansion in use of motor vehicles by implementing legislation to provide funds for farm-to-market roads and the first major expressways in the country.

Interested in education, Gentry helped to establish Tyler Junior College. He served as U.S. Congressman, 1953-1957, for Third Congressional District of Texas. A member of committees for public works and roads, he helped design legislation for the interstate highway system. He refused to vote along merely political lines.

The pre-eminent position of the Texas Highway Department and the high quality of roads in Texas and the U.S. are a tribute to the ability of Brady P. Gentry.

### **Tree Farms**

Star G Nursery, Gandy Nursery, JT Tree Farm, and Price Tree Farm are all located near Van.

### **Peach Tree Farm**

This peach orchard provides the juicy fruit seasonally for markets, restaurants, and special events.

### **Wind Rose Retreat at Saline Creek Farm**

[www.windrosetreat.com](http://www.windrosetreat.com)

### **Cabin in the Woods**

Guests find peace and quiet in this cabin nestled in the woods on a private lake. [www.airbnb.com/rooms/13122055](http://www.airbnb.com/rooms/13122055)

### **East Texas Zoo & Gator Park**

See dozens of alligators, from hatchlings all the way up to one that is 14 feet long called Domino. Enclosures are designed to get close to view them either basking on the banks in the sun, swimming in the pond, or eating a snack. The alligators become dormant in the winter months and stop eating. They also have primates big and small, as well as exotic cats, lemurs, monkeys, and reptiles. The Duck Pond is between two covered pavilions, a perfect spot for a relaxing picnic. [www.easttexaszooandgator.com](http://www.easttexaszooandgator.com)



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# VAN ZANDT

ARTS & CULTURAL DISTRICT



2019-2020 Education & Community Program Guide  
music • visual arts • dance • theatre • literary arts • sculpture



# 279 ARTISANS TRAIL

*(Includes the 279/2339/773 Triangle between Edom and Ben Wheeler)*

A few years ago the artists of Ben Wheeler and Edom began talking about developing the beautiful eight miles of countryside between them on FM 279, a road which begins and ends with their two towns. They call it 279 Artisan Trail. They talk about a lighted bike trail, have held cooperative arts events, and the conversations and possibilities continue today.

Many of the artists and entrepreneurs of Edom and Ben Wheeler reside along 279 and current businesses now include Double T Nursery Tree Farm; Red Bird Cafe; Marquess Arrow Ranch, home of world record longhorns; Beulah Land Ranch, with grass-fed, registered, miniature and classic size Hereford cattle; The Retreat B&B, and numerous other B&Bs and AirBnBs.

Edom City Limits is a venue rental facility and an ongoing event is a weekly Two Stepping Tuesdays, a community dance night with a live band.

Forming a triangular area from 279, are 2339 out of Edom and 773 from Ben Wheeler. Dotted the countryside here on the south edge of the district is the Callender Lake community and a number of interesting businesses well known to the locals and visitors from all over the country.

## Callender Lake

A gated lakeside community of 1,500 or so, residents are intricately entwined with the Edom and Ben Wheeler communities and the kids attend Van ISD. Many of the artists live around the 365-acre spring-fed lake, some using the soil from their own property to create exquisite pottery, while others fashion jewelry and other crafts that are sold in community shops.

Callender Lake is a second home to people from Dallas and elsewhere who escape to the area as often as possible. Air BnB rentals are available.



F A R M R O A D

279



ARTISAN'S TRAIL  
EDOM TO BEN WHEELER, TEXAS



## Lakefront Getaway

This Callender Lake AirBnB features a lake view bar and fire pit area, paddle boat, and a general “get away from it all” ambience. [www.airbnb.com/rooms/44390029](http://www.airbnb.com/rooms/44390029)



## Historical Marker Tyler-Porters Bluff Road

First mapped in 1846 and 1849 by state surveyors John Lawler and Samuel Huffer, this trail may pre-date Mexican rule. Used as a military road and a cattle trail, it extended from Tyler in Smith County to Porter’s Bluff in northwestern Navarro County. By 1870, the Memphis and El Paso Stage Line made twelve mail stops along that route, nine of them in Van Zandt County. Much of the old trail near Edom was included when State Highways 64 and 279, as well as local farm roads, were created. Vestiges of the Tyler-Porter’s Bluff Road are still visible in some locations.

## Beall Berry Farm

## Asbury Cemetery

The first recorded burial on this site was that of Asbury Lowery (1836-1855). The new burial ground was named in his memory. Maintained by an association, the cemetery contains almost 400 recorded and marked burials and approximately 30 unmarked graves. Among the unmarked graves is believed to be that of pioneer Van Zandt County settler Esable Lindsey and six of her children. The Asbury Cemetery continues to be a chronicle of the pioneers of Van Zandt County. (1998)



## GRAVESTONE

## First Burial Site of Little Prairie Flower

In 1863, Prairie Flower (1858-1863) — also called Topsannah — the young daughter of celebrated Comanche Indian captive Cynthia Ann Parker and Comanche Chief Peta Nocona, was interred at Asbury Cemetery in Edom when she died of pneumonia while living with relatives of her mother. Her remains were later moved to Oklahoma to join those of her mother and her brother, famous Comanche leader Quanah Parker. Cynthia Ann Parker’s story is the subject of many books and has inspired various characters in works of fiction and film, from “The Searchers,” starring John Wayne and Natalie Wood, to “Dances With Wolves,” starring Kevin Costner.





## Glenda Mae's Daylily Farm

A great supplier of daylilies in unique display gardens. Visitors are welcome to tour the gardens. Peak season is late May through mid June. [www.glendamaedaylilyfarm.com](http://www.glendamaedaylilyfarm.com)

## The Dam Beer Store

## Callender Lake Store

Convenience store also featuring burgers, groceries, bait, and beer. And sometimes fried pies.

## Circle Star Pet Resort

All-inclusive pet resort situated on a beautiful 100-acre ranch, Circle Star Pet Resort offers boarding for dogs, cats, horses, or other critters; daycare; training; and grooming. [www.circlestarpetresort.com](http://www.circlestarpetresort.com)

## The Pegasus Project

Amazing horse rescue ranch. [www.mypegususproject.org](http://www.mypegususproject.org)

## White Fox Vineyards

Established in 2015 and situated on 330 acres, White Fox Vineyards is a family-owned boutique winery that produces hand crafted local wines produced and bottled onsite. Most are made from estate-grown muscadines and grapes.

## Historical Marker Mars Community

A settlement known as Mars flourished from the 1880s until about 1930 at the crossroads of the Tyler-Porter's Bluff Road (now FM 2339) and the Canton-Athens Road (now FM 773). Wheat was the original crop that area farmers grew, but cotton soon replaced it as the primary crop. H.W. Brown built a cotton gin and grist mill for the community, and a blacksmith shop and two mercantile stores soon followed. In 1891, a post office was established to serve the settlement. Originally called Acme, the station's name was changed seven years later to Mars to reflect the name of the community. A declining population caused the post office to close in 1907 and the school to consolidate with the Bois D'Arc School in 1916. Although little physical evidence remains of the Mars community, its history helps illustrate the story of cotton gin settlements in Texas.



PHOTO BY CHRIS CHRISTENSEN



PHOTO BY CRAIG D. BLACKMON, FAIA



PHOTO BY CRAIG D. BLACKMON, FAIA





# BEN WHEELER

Folks in Historic Ben Wheeler are proud of their designation as the “Wild Hog Capital of Texas” and take that as a cue to go “hog wild” any chance they get. It’s an unincorporated community and the business owners like it that way. They have their own quirky, fancy-free way of doing things and visitors come from miles away to see why a few years ago *Texas Highways* magazine gave it recognition as “One of the Coolest Small Towns in Texas.”

Ben Wheeler was named for the first man to carry mail into the area. Its rich history is part of the town’s charm. It dwindled to just a few old businesses downtown until 2008 when the late entrepreneur Brooks Gremmels began buying up property and restoring it to the lively community seen today.

Renovated historic buildings provide an idyllic ambience to go along with modern culinary and artisanal offerings. Farmers and ranchers provide fresh ingredients for the two restaurants that anchor the town located in former mercantile and blacksmith shops. Retaining the community’s small town charm and historic roots in farming and ranching remains a vital component to the success of Ben Wheeler.

Numerous stages and outdoor gathering areas help map out Ben Wheeler as a mini-mecca for live music with a community-friendly stage for homegrown Texas talent.

For overnight guests, several hotels are nearby and closer to town are numerous bed & breakfasts, air BnBs, and an RV and campground resort is right downtown.

The rustic community is also home to boutique stores with clothing, antiques, records, and gifts. A knifsmith shop and a winery are popular stops for many. The downtown businesses sit amongst groves of lush tall East Texas oak trees and they take full advantage of utilizing park-like settings throughout the town. Carefully chosen attention to details is apparent in each little specialty shop in downtown Ben Wheeler. Along the north side of its main street, visitors find a winery, knifsmith, arts and crafts, old records, antiques, and the first restoration, Moore’s Store.



PHOTO BY CRAIG D. BLACKMON, FMAA



PHOTO BY TOM GRIDDIE



Ben Wheeler is a fun visit any time of the year but organizers go all out for their annual and pop-up events. Annual events include Tribute to Townes Van Zandt, Motorized Barstool Races, Junebug Summer Faire, July 4th Concert & Fireworks Festival, Fall Feral Hog Festival, and new events are a regular occurrence. There's never a dull moment and plenty of room for people of all ages to find their own way to "ham it up."

### **Pine Ridge Properties**

Connected by a lovely downtown park, a chapel, schoolhouse, and home are available for rent. The chapel offers simplistic beauty to compliment multiple event types and themes. Comfortably seating a hundred guests, the chapel offers indoor and outdoor space for event celebrations. Formerly in the community of Elwood, the schoolhouse was moved by sections to its current location in downtown Ben Wheeler and beautifully restored in 2010. It served as a library for many years and was renovated again by Pine Ridge Properties in recent years to serve as a special events facility. Overnight lodging is available in a small home with other rentals or as a stand alone AirBnB experience. [www.propertiesofpineridge.com](http://www.propertiesofpineridge.com)

### **Turkey Creek**

Works Progress Administration (WPA) chose to line this creek bed with native rocks and concrete in the early 1930's. More than a half mile of creek bottoms/sides were stabilized and beautified by an army of local workers trained by skilled masons. Proof of their competency is seen some 75 years later in the well-preserved, structurally-sound stone work.

### **Pine Ridge Park**

With Turkey Creek running through at a slow trickle most of the time, Pine Ridge Park is a beautiful place to take a relaxing walk and it provides a natural setting behind the downtown shops on the north side of the main drag.

### **Turkey Creek Country Resort**

Turkey Creek Country Resort is an RV park home to locals, travelers, and Ben Wheeler's Feral Hog Festival. Visions to expand the property include adding more amenities for guests and cabins to make this a perfect spot for a stay in downtown Ben Wheeler. [www.turkeycreekcountryresort.com](http://www.turkeycreekcountryresort.com)







PHOTO BY CRAIG D. BLACKMON, FAIA

## Welcome to Historic Ben Wheeler RC & Moon Pie Mural

A nod to musician Big Bill Lister’s song “Gimme an RC Cola and Moon Pie.”

## Vintage Cork

A cozy winery and wine bar serving Texas wines from local winemakers and vintners across the state. In production to release in-house meads, making them one of the first meaderies in all of East Texas. Currently under a rebrand from a wine bar and boutique, the new owners have plans to incorporate a small market area with local goods and gifts and hope to expand into a coffee shop/cafe along with the winery. [www.vintagecork.brigadetechnology.com](http://www.vintagecork.brigadetechnology.com)

## The Blade Bar

What was once home to beloved nationally renowned knifemaker, Dan Harrison, The Blade Bar is now home to Johnathan Sibley of Djinn Designs. Featured on *Forged in Fire* on the History Channel, Johnathan and his family moved to town to continue the craftsmanship of fine knifemaking. [www.thebladebartx.com](http://www.thebladebartx.com)

## Blessed Bee

Eclectic shopping spot for lovers of handmade goods, crafted items, and all things magical.

## Tribal Root Designs

One of the newest storefronts to downtown Ben Wheeler, Tribal Root Designs offers custom handmade gifts and more.

## BE’s Records & Collectables

This small town record store is every collector’s dream. Stocked full of records old and new, everyone is sure to find an album they’ll love.

## Mr. B’s Antique Store

Quaint antique store full of finds from the past.

## HISTORICAL MARKER Ben Wheeler Community

Just as Native Americans were attracted to this area because of the climate and resources, early settlers also utilized these resources. The area was originally named Clough after George W. Clough (1820-1884) who, in 1868, purchased the 640-acre Harvey Randolph Survey. The northwest corner of his land became



the majority of the old downtown of Ben Wheeler. Clough established a post office in his home in 1876 and became the first postmaster.

The post office was named Ben Wheeler in honor of Kentucky native Benjamin F. Wheeler. Wheeler came to Texas in 1847 and contracted to carry the mail from Tyler to Buffalo and was the first person to carry mail into Van Zandt County.

In the early 1880's George Clough applied for permission to move the post office to his store in town and change the name to Georgetown. Permission was granted to move the post office but the name remained Ben Wheeler since there was already a town named Georgetown.

Ancel Clough, heir to George Clough, sold 50 acres in 1885 to Professor James F. Davidson. In 1890, Davidson and J.W. Downs established the Alamo Institute, the first school of higher learning in Van Zandt County.

The town grew rapidly from 1885 to 1892 and boasted four general stores, two grocery stores, a drug store, boarding houses, a hotel, three gins and mills, a blacksmith and wood working shop, two churches and the Alamo Institute. Fires in 1893, 1933 and in 1945 destroyed businesses in the downtown area. Ben Wheeler's growth began to decline in 1929, but stabilized in the 1960's when the area farmers transitioned into ranching and coastal Bermuda haying operations.

### **Moore's Store**

Located in the historic general store, Moore's Store is a staple of the Ben Wheeler community for local music acts and homestyle meals. [www.mooresstore.com](http://www.mooresstore.com)

### **Syrup Mill**

The W.A. Peden Syrup Mill was moved to this location circa 2010. The Peden family still operates it one day a year as part of the activities of the Fall Feral Hog Festival in October.



## HISTORICAL MARKER Cane Syrup Production in VZ County

The tradition of making syrup from sugar cane and sorghum started in East Texas in the second half of the nineteenth century. Syrup production arrived along with migration from the Deep South to East Texas. Van Zandt County provided the ideal combination of fertile soil and abundant water for the farming of sugar cane syrup. Willis Jarrell Hale was the first farmer to gain notoriety for producing syrup in Van Zandt County. In 1884, Hale started farming and growing ribbon cane on what became known as the Hale Farm which was located two and a half miles east of Canton. Hale developed the land so that he could irrigate the cane using the flood method from a large spring on the property, frequently making 600 gallons of syrup to the acre. Hale Farm syrup developed a reputation for superior quality all over Texas as well as nationally. Hale produced this famous syrup for 23 years. Henry D. Jones acquired the farm in 1915 from Metza Hale, son of W.J., and carried on the tradition of syrup making. Jones managed to expand the operation and create publicity over the next 45 years. He built a modern syrup mill with a gasoline engine and was farming 20 acres of ribbon cane. The sale of his Hale Farm syrup reached from Missouri to California, as well as all over the state of Texas. The Hale Farm employed many members of the Van Zandt community during the Great Depression. Demand for ribbon cane syrup declined after WWII, but production continued until 1960. The ownership of the land still remains in the Jones family. Marker is Property of the State of Texas.



## Historical Marker Alamo Institute

In 1890 Van Zandt County had 81 schools but none for higher learning. In April 1890, Prof. James F. Davidson and J. W. Downs held a community meeting in the Old Clough School House in Ben Wheeler. They presented a plan, adopted unanimously, to establish Alamo Institute if citizens transferred control of Clough School. The institute's main building was completed in time for the fall semester. By 1894 the campus included a pair of two-story buildings. Courses included history, Latin, science, music and voice culture. Alamo Institute closed before 1911. State representative, county and district attorney, and U. S. Congressman Morgan G. Sanders was the most prominent graduate.







## Historical Marker Morgan G. Sanders

Legislator Morgan Gurley Sanders (July 14, 1878 - January 7, 1956) was born near Ben Wheeler. He published newspapers, worked as journal clerk of the state senate and was admitted to the State Bar of Texas before winning a seat in the state legislature. His public service as a politician included terms as a state legislator (1903-07), Van Zandt County attorney (1911-15), district attorney (1915-17) and U.S. Congressman (1921-39); he also continued to practice law. In 1931, Speaker of the House John Nance Garner appointed Sanders to his previous position on the powerful ways and means committee. He remained active in Van Zandt County until his death.

## Ben Wheeler Fire Department

Meeting space is available for rent and special popular fundraising events take place throughout the year include a chili cook-off and fish fry. The community shows up in record numbers to support these volunteer heroes.

## Pickin Porch Park

This is where new life began for the resurrection of Ben Wheeler. A 4th of July celebration brought hundreds of neighbors out to gather that hadn't seen each other in years. Live music filled the air that day and continued as jam sessions began weekly with people driving up and sitting on their tailgates to listen or join in. The Pickin Porch is center stage for many events and it's become a favorite backdrop for weddings and outdoor photo shoots.

## New Bakery

Upscale bakery opening soon.

## Saxon Tomatoes

Saxon Farms is famous for its tomatoes grown in Ben Wheeler. Started by E.L. and Mary Jane Saxon in 1950, it's still operated by family. Their tomatoes are known throughout far and wide for being large and meaty, and having a bold vine-ripened taste. Besides getting these beauties to restaurants, markets, and stores in a three-state area, locals line up at the little unassuming old farmhouse on 279 to find them on a table under a tree in the front yard with a little sign that reads "put your money in the jar and take what you want."







PHOTO BY CRAIG D. BLACKMON, FAMA

## **Curtain Club Properties**

This expansive bar and live music complex is owned and operated by Curtain Club Properties, formerly of Deep Ellum in Dallas and the vision of Nashville investor Trent Conrad. It is first and foremost a live music venue and also features karaoke, pool and corn hole tournaments, and several distinct bar areas where patrons find just the right fit for their listening, playing, or chilling pleasure. A backyard concert area surrounded by 10 acres of beautiful countryside and outdoor patio seating with views of historic downtown Ben Wheeler add a relaxing ambience to the venue. [www.thebluestarlive.com](http://www.thebluestarlive.com)

## **Touch of Grace**

Located in the heart of downtown Ben Wheeler is this combo beauty salon and juice bar.

## **Glitz & Spurs**

Small town boutique with a big time following. Glitz & Spurs

has made themselves a staple in the western fashion community, amassing more than 151,000 followers on their social media platforms. [www.glitzandspursboutique.com](http://www.glitzandspursboutique.com)

## **The Forge Bar & Grill**

The Forge is an eclectic bistro and bar hosting a long list of musicians and artists in a historic blacksmith shop. There's a touch of the past all through the building. A handmade artisan bar takes center stage while the diverse menu offers daily gourmet specials as well as sandwiches, salads, pizzas, and vegetarian options. For many it is the outdoor seating with park-like ambience that has what some call an "Austin" vibe. [www.theforge-benwheeler.com](http://www.theforge-benwheeler.com)

## **The Pig Bus**

A renovated old school bus was painted pink and has a really long pick snout, ears, and curly tail. It's a favorite in the local parades and for photo ops.



PHOTO BY TOM GEDDIE



LOW PLACES, DCU RETREAT CENTER



PHOTO BY DAVE HENSLEY



## Door Controls USA

Door Controls USA is located in Ben Wheeler with a world-wide clientele. Founded by local entrepreneur and Ben Wheeler native Don Gilchrist and his late wife Sharon, their children Summer and Paxton have ownership today, employing more than 220 people with about 180 of them in their two-story complex in tiny Ben Wheeler. The company offers a wide range of products in the automatic door industry. They are generous supporters and investors in the community and bring hundreds of vendors and clients through each year for training and hospitality. They are a shining example of a successful large-scale business operating from a small rural Texas town. [www.doorcontrolsusa.com](http://www.doorcontrolsusa.com)

## Low Places

One of the things Door Controls USA did many years ago was build a beautiful lodge near their operations for training and entertaining their clients from all over the world. Low Places allows for a country, secluded experience nestled in the woods of Ben Wheeler for corporate retreats. Visitors enjoy an entertainment area on the first floor with a pool table and a full-sized chef kitchen. The side veranda is fully equipped with a built-in grill that overlooks a shady wooded forest. The back porch features a fire pit table, which is great for keeping warm on a cool night. Upstairs are three bedrooms that share an outdoor patio balcony. Each room has its own bathroom and a shared upstairs refrigerator in the hallway.

## Price Nursery

## Tree Town USA

## Serenity Springs

This event venue has 20 secluded acres with a seven and a half acre lake and a 4,800 square foot rustic building accommodating up to 200 guests. [www.serenityspringstexas.com](http://www.serenityspringstexas.com)

## Los Pinos Mexican Restaurant

A local favorite for Tex Mex, this restaurant offers an extensive menu of all the usual Mexican eats and then some.

## Berry Bush Blueberry Farm

Part of the Blueberry Hill Farms family in Edom are two berry orchards along State Highway 64 in Ben Wheeler.





### **Ben Wheeler Post Office**

Named for Benjamin Wheeler who brought the mail to people so grateful they named the town and the post office after him. It is thought to be the only post office in the country with both a first and last name of a person.

### **Four T Saddles & Tack**

A popular spot for all things horses, customers come from a 60-mile radius or so for the deals they find here.

### **Kellam Solar**

Solar energy panels cover 372 acres on FM 773, a stark contrast to the cattle and large rolled bales of hay just across the street.

### **The Wilde House**

Bohemian Farmhouse AirBnB. The Wilde House is a modern farmhouse sitting on one acre in Ben Wheeler overlooking a beautiful pond. It has an open living room and dining room, sliding walls that open the house up and three outdoor sitting areas. Guests can relax in the screened in porch, take a long bath in the claw foot tub or enjoy a dinner on the patio. [www.airbnb.com/rooms/45398753](http://www.airbnb.com/rooms/45398753)

### **Arc Ridge Ranch Resort**

The quiet beauty of the ranch, and especially the interior craftsmanship for many of the homes, are attributed to philanthropist Brooks Gremmels, who is credited with revitalizing Ben Wheeler. The same attention to detail he applied to his guest houses on the ranch, he applied to businesses in Ben Wheeler. The Butterfly & Cantina have interior custom wood work taken from trees on the ranch, and many of the interior decorations in all the homes were handmade by local artists around Ben Wheeler and Edom. For a 70's flashback, the Dogwood cabin, hidden in the lakefront trees, has wood paneling, orange countertops, yellow sink and green cabinets. [www.arcridgeranchresort.com](http://www.arcridgeranchresort.com)

*The communities of  
Edom, Van, and Ben Wheeler  
and all points in between  
offer plenty of history, art, food, fun,  
and entertainment for local citizens  
who readily roll out the welcome wagon  
for travelers from near and far.*



**VAN ZANDT**  
ARTS & CULTURAL DISTRICT  
FOUNDATION  
2018 — 2022

*The Van Zandt Arts & Cultural District Foundation wishes to thank these companies and individuals for their generous donations to our mission over the past five years to enhance and promote the value of the district's creative and economic life.*



P.A. Geddie, Randy Martin, Kerian Massey,  
David Teel, Ruthann Askew, Summer Gilchrist Derrick, Jan Blackmon,  
Craig Blackmon, Shanna Wiggins, Sara Brisco, KaLynn Johnson,  
James Wilhite, Mary Wilhite, Kara Burris, Beth Brown, Don Gilchrist,  
Georgia Christensen, LeAnn Sellers, Shelley Moore McClanahan,  
Katie Birk, Tom Geddie, Potters Brown, Bill Hullum CPA, Chef Michael Smith,  
Kristi Johnston, Samantha Owens, Gaile Robinson, Karen Price,  
Allyson & Mike DeCanio, Karen Crawford, Jim & Alexandra Prevratil,  
Dragonhead Retreat, Glenda Mae's Daylily Farm, Linda Mastaglio,  
Arbor Castle Birdhouses, Wood Haven Cabins, Mariposa Cabin,  
East Texas Sip & Shop, 4B Products, The Old Firehouse, Cabin in the Woods,  
Marilyn Pippin, Country Charm Bed & Breakfast, Bill & Linda Ayers,  
Melinda Wacaser, Jill Dutton, Krista Leard Nicholls, Jeanette Germany

*We appreciate all whose work through the foundation will continue to have positive long-term effects on our communities for years to come.*



# Van Zandt Arts & Cultural District YOUNG ARTISTS

Texas Tourism State Assessment, 2022

Van Zandt County HOT Funds Research, 2022

Potters Brown State Historical Marker, 2022

Marty Zewick Artist Award, 2021

Little Free Art Shops, 2020-2022

Texas State Fair Art Contest, 2020

Student Assistance Program, 2020-2022

Arts Activity Funding Program, 2020-2022

Artists Sunday Campaign, 2020

Junebug Summer Fair, Farm to Table Dinner, 2019

Tribute to Townes Van Zandt, 2019-2022

Van ISD Art Teachers Staff Development Days, 2019

Leadership Van Zandt Tour, 2019

Van ISD Student Art Exhibition, Edom Art Festival, 2019

Gardens & Wines Tour, 2019

Texas Downtown Association Member, 2019-2021

Young Artists Booth, Van Go Art Fair, 2019

Van Go Art Fair, 2019

Sharon Gilchrist Student Christmas Card  
Art Contest, 2018-2022

Wine on Down the Road, 2018

180th Anniversary, Battle of the Neches, 2018

Valentine's Day Getaway Campaign, 2018

Van Go Arts Club, 2018-2022

VZACD Promotions, 2018-2022

VZACD Merchant Networking Meetings, 2018-2020

Van ISD Journalism Students/Tourism  
Business Listings, 2018-2019

VZACD Tourism Business Research & Development,  
2018-2022

VZACD Art Center, Van, Research, 2018-2019

Arts Outreach Program for Van ISD  
Students/Teachers 2018-2022





**VAN ZANDT**  
ARTS & CULTURAL DISTRICT



*Better Together*