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Clay ROBINSON

If granted, Gov. Perry's request for more detail in university budgets would allow more line-item vetoes  
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## Prehistoric S. Texas comes alive on Web

Popular site's new exhibit looks back 13,500 years.

BY MELISSA LUDWIG  
EXPRESS-NEWS STAFF WRITER

Archaeologists work hard unlocking the secrets of the past. They dig up artifacts, catalog them and figure out what they mean. Then they stow them in drawers where few people ever see them and write about them in dry academic journals few people ever read.

TexasBeyondHistory.net aims to change all that.

A self-titled virtual museum, the Web site is dusting off the story of prehistoric Texas, wrapping it in a shiny package and presenting it to a global audience. It has easy-to-read narratives, pictures, movies, children's games and lesson plans for teachers, all meticulously compiled using 80 years of research and artifacts from all the state's major archaeological collections, including one at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

first-class piece," said Steve Tomka, director of the Center for Archaeological Research at UTSA and a contributor to the exhibit. "It's really up-to-date ... and represents the state of knowledge from the professional community."

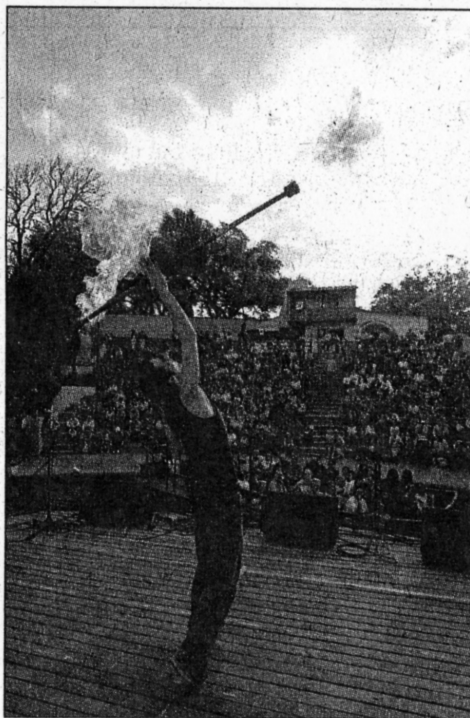
The site was created with little fanfare in 2001 by staff at the University of Texas at Austin's Texas Archaeological Research Laboratory, the state's oldest and largest archaeological collection.

Despite the lack of publicity, the site's popularity grew steadily, especially with teachers, professors, students and history buffs. In 2005, the site logged 1 million virtual visitors, and it is recognized by the National Endowment for the Humanities as one of the nation's top education Web sites.

All this with a shoestring staff and a wobbly stream of grant money, said Susan Whitaker Dial, the Web site's co-editor and a research associate at the laboratory.

"We are always in a funding crisis," Dial said. But that hasn't slowed down Dial or her colleagues.

"Much of what has been dug



JERRY LARA/STAFF

Mystik, a member of Brothers of the Flame, performs during Hanukkah on the River at the Arneson River Theater.

## Hanukkah festival marked by faith,

Jugglers and dance music make for a spirited celebration on the river downtown.

BY LISA MARIE GÓMEZ  
EXPRESS-NEWS STAFF WRITER

They filled seven barges and sang Hanukkah songs such as "I Have a Little Dreidel" and "Oh Hanukkah, Oh Hanukkah" as they waved to people who were eating or strolling along the River Walk on Sunday.

The ninth annual Hanukkah on the River attracted some 800 people, mostly Jewish, to the outdoor Arneson River Theater, where they watched a fire and juggling show and the lighting of the third candle on a giant menorah.

But the highlight that drew their feet was a Jewish Argentine called Kef and his music. Children with beaded wrists wiggled their bodies to the music and didn't see the menorah.

"This is such a beautiful event," said a woman named Nette Solomon, who was in town with her husband, a friend from Houston.

It was their first time they had their sights set on the event thanks to the recommendation of friends from Houston.

But neither of the couples knew about the event.

"We just stumbled onto it."

See HUNDREDS/2B



We wanted to bring the spirit of Christmas closer to us, and I thought this might be a good way."

The posada starts at Milam Park and ends at San Fernando Cathedral, which sponsors the annual event. In between, Mary and Joseph make stops at the Spanish Governors' Palace, City Hall and the county courthouse — El Mercado was removed as a stop this year because of construction — in search of lodging. But they're turned away.

Finally the couple — Mary sitting sidesaddle on a fiberglass donkey, which is hoisted on a flatbed dolly, and Joseph standing by her side — arrive at the cathedral, where they are admitted.

Along the way, people in the candlelight procession sing

dral's actor.

Maryann Cortinas was part of the mix. She and daughter Destiny, 12, along with other family members, attended their second Gran Posada.

"I think it's a sacrifice that I make to try to be here and share it with my family so they can know the true meaning (of Christmas)," Cortinas said.

Posadas date back to the 1500s, when Spanish missionaries used dramatic re-enactments to share the Gospel with the indigenous people of Mexico.

San Fernando Cathedral began its posada in 1731, with the founding of the city, Garcia said. The San Antonio Conservation Society, he said, also hosted an annual posada but discontinued it years ago, making the cathedral's the city's

the event so they can learn that Christmas is about more than just gifts.

"The Christmas season is so filled with all kinds of other things," he said. "But the issue for the church is, how do we kind of penetrate the secularization and the commercialism of Christmas? One of the things we can do is, we can continue to keep this tradition alive."

La Gran Posada isn't an antidote to the commercialism of Christmas, Garcia said. But at least, he said, one evening every December, hundreds of people can unite to remember the true meaning of the holiday as they spread the story of Mary and Joseph's struggles.

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week ago, they said he "never sounded so strong and happy."

Paul Balint Sr. said his son, Pfc. Paul Balint Jr., asked his family for prayers for safety for everyone in Iraq.

Five days later, on Friday, Paul Balint Jr. died in Ar Ramadi after being injured when his unit came under attack.

Balint had been in Iraq for three months and in the Army

Balint came from a military background and joined up after his family moved from Virginia to Willow Park, about 20 miles west of Fort Worth.

His father, mother and younger brother went with him to the Army recruiting station, Paul Balint Sr. said.

"He wanted to be in the infantry," his father said. "I

1st Battalion, 5th Regiment, 1st Brigade Team, 1st Armored Division, Friedberg, Germany

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## Prehistoric South Texas gracing Web

CONTINUED FROM 1B

For Bexar County residents, some of those stories are close to home.

For example, the new South Texas Plains exhibit features the Richard Beene site, an archaeological treasure trove that sits across from the Toyota plant on the Medina River. It was discovered in 1989 during construction of a reservoir that never was finished.

Because of occasional floods, silt piled up in the river's flood plain, trapping artifacts in perfect time-ordered layers dating back 15,000 years. Mammoth leg bones, stone dart tips and ax heads, grinding stones, earth ovens and charred animal bones tell the story of ancient people who hunted and gathered food in the region before the Spaniards arrived and began writing things down.

"Most Texans start Texas history with the Alamo," said Al-

ston V. Thoms, an anthropology professor at Texas A&M University in College Station who excavated the Richard Beene site and wrote a piece about it for the Web site.

Thoms assigns readings from the site for his graduate and undergraduate classes.

"(My students) are always amazed that there is such a rich history in Texas," Thoms said. "They often express disappointment in their grade school and high school education and how woefully little they were informed of Texas' native past."

Thoms believes enough educators are now using TexasBeyondHistory.net as a resource that it will have a "measurable effect" on how children perceive archaeology and American Indian ancestors.

One of those educators is Peggy Durack, a librarian at Hobby Middle School in the Northside Independent School District.

"It blows me away every time I see it," Durack said of the site. Its interactive features keep kids interested, she said.

In the Richard Beene exhibit, for instance, children can watch an animated movie that shows how the Medina River floods, trapping artifacts in layers of dirt. They can also open doors in each dirt layer to see what artifacts were found, as well as artistic renderings of what life was like during that period.

And because Dial and her colleagues have worked closely with the scientific community across Texas, teachers can be sure the information is accurate and up to date, something that can't be said for many textbooks.

"You have thousands of kids in Texas learning about Texas prehistory," said Tomka of UTSA. "They can log on and have a virtual classroom at their fingertips."

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