

Volume 27, Number 20

August 12, 2005

Dear Client:

Austin hotels have been through a few rough years, but optimism abounds now and this means more hotel rooms are being built and renovations are underway.

Finally. The bottom fell out for all travel and tourist related businesses after 9/11, but Austin's hotels have now rebounded to where their **occupancy levels are back to where they were prior to 2001**. This is healthy for the Austin economy because hotel occupants run around all over the city, spending money with local merchants, then go back home. The travel business is a clean industry coveted by all cities.

And the Austin hotel industry is gearing up to handle even more business. Two adjoining Marriott properties – a Residence Inn and Marriott Courtyard Inn – will **add nearly 450 rooms to the downtown inventory at this time next year**. Located adjacent to the Austin Convention Center at 4th Street, the two hotels will have their own meeting facilities for smaller groups.

Also, city officials are working with developers on plans for **three more downtown hotels**. A 41-story residential/retail/hotel highrise is planned for **Congress and 5th** and construction on a hotel property at **West 3rd and Bowie Streets** is set to begin in a year. Also plans for a luxury hotel at **3rd and Colorado**, next to the Bitter End restaurant, are coming right along.

Some longtime properties are being spiffed up nicely. **A million dollar renovation of the downtown Radisson Hotel** on Cesar Chavez was completed this week with the opening of a Starbucks (they're everywhere!) in the lobby. Next month, **the Barton Creek Resort & Spa debuts a newly expanded Darrell Royal ballroom**. The expansion will add 1,000 square feet to the ballroom for a total of 8,240 square feet.

Speaking of tourists, one **natural attraction in Austin that has gained worldwide notoriety** is a relatively new phenomenon. It was only about 25 years ago a handful of Mexican free-tailed bats arrived in Austin and started roosting under the Congress Avenue bridge over Town Lake. Within five years, those original inhabitants multiplied by tens of thousands. Now, it is **the largest urban bat colony in the world**. Guess how many bats roost under the bridge from April through early November. Give up? Try 1.5 million. It's one of Austin's most popular attractions and a BatFest will be inaugurated 9/3-4/05 to celebrate the occasion.

Austin has been named the #1 US city for Hispanics to live, work and play – beating out cities more commonly considered Hispanic havens.

The designation is not some Chamber of Commerce ranking. It comes from a national magazine highly regarded in the US Hispanic community. *Hispanic* magazine not only named **Austin as the top city in the nation for Hispanics, it did so for the second consecutive year.** And to underscore this designation is no fluke, Austin has ranked in the three most popular places for Hispanics for the fourth consecutive year.

So, what makes Austin so attractive to Hispanics? Well, according to the mag, **low crime rates and reasonable housing costs** are important. It also mentioned Hispanics make up a huge bloc of the population – 30%.

The article also singles out the city's **rich cultural scene**, particularly, the Latin music series at the new City Hall Plaza in May, the annual **Carnival Brasileiro** and the abundance of good Latin restaurants.

With Austin as a clear-cut number one, what cities – in what order – make up the list? Following Austin on the Top Ten, in order: **Albuquerque, Los Angeles, San Jose, San Antonio, Las Vegas, El Paso, San Diego, Miami** and **Chicago**. It's interesting Austin ranks above cities that are so identified with Hispanics, such as San Antonio, El Paso and Miami.

Longtime residents will remember the all-out war that accompanied Austin's participation in the building of a nuclear power plant near the Texas coast. The conflict ripped asunder the political fabric of our city. Guess what's happening now.

We ran across a forecast that predicts **fifteen – count 'em, 15 – nuclear power plants will be built in the US over the next fifteen years.** And opposition is expected to be minimal, compared to the past. Why? Our friends at *The Kiplinger Letter* say previous concerns over nuclear power expressed by environmentalists are being blunted by concerns about global warming and greenhouse gases attributable to coal and natural gas fired power plants.

The US's voracious appetite for energy is fueling this demand for nuclear power. And not only is the **demand soaring**, but electrical power generated by the nuke is the **least expensive** of the alternatives. The US has a long way to go to catch up with other countries in their reliance on the nuke. For instance, France gets a whopping 78% of its power from the nuke. In the US, *after* the new nukes are built, the forecast calls for only about 25% of our power to be nuke generated.

Austin's 16% of the South Texas Nuclear Project has been providing **reliable, cheap electricity for decades now** – and nary a peep has been heard from prior opponents. Do we see a trend!

Did you flinch when you saw the headlines that declared Austin Independent School District schools were slipping in the accountability rankings? Well, you should have. But there's a story behind the story.

As required by state law, the Texas Education Agency examines all the public schools in Texas to rank them by academic performance. **The laudable objective is to hold the schools accountable for teaching Texas children.** There is no question that, overall, the Texas public school system needs to improve the academic achievements of its students. The rankings put the naked glare of publicity on the schools that don't meet pre-set standards. And the Austin ISD fell backwards in the recent rankings.

The number of recognized and exemplary campuses in AISD **dropped from 23 in 2004 to 21 in 2005.** And, even more disturbing, Anderson High School in northwest Austin was rated **academically unacceptable**, as were five other campuses. Every parent, concerned citizen and taxpayer should flinch reading this.

The results should not be sugar-coated. They are what they are. And the ranking should rally those involved – even peripherally – to action. But, as is the case with many rankings such as these, there is a story behind the story that helps to understand what is happening here.

Bottom line: **the standards are not static. They are raised each year** – as they should be, if you're going to accomplish the goal of raising the academic performance of the students. What happened is **many of the Austin schools failed to improve as much as the standards were raised.** Hence the schools slipped backwards in the rankings.

Our space limitations do not permit us to go into the detail of the different factors that are considered and how a school must reach certain levels in each of those areas to obtain a high ranking. But, suffice it to say that **each year the standards get tougher and the bar is continually being raised** for the teachers and the students.

Again, this is as it should be. Remember, there are school districts right here in the Austin area that year-after-year **measure up to increasing standards and excel.** The Eanes Independent School District in the western part of Travis County comes to mind. While it is difficult to compare districts, this is nevertheless one shining example in our midst that the rising standards not only can be met but exceeded.

The Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce is heavily immersed in working with area schools to increase the quality of the labor force for Austin area employers. Generally, the better education our youth receive, the better employees they become. The GACofC, reviewing these rankings, reassured its members saying **"Austin parents and employers should know that their public schools are improving significantly each year."** Yes, but. The improvement is not fast enough and the published rankings continue to tarnish our community's reputation.

Though he's been dead a quarter century now, the Texan whom historians credit with recording the song that launched the rock 'n roll era is smiling from the grave because his band members, now in their 70s and 80s, are still rockin' 'n rollin' to enthusiastic crowds.

It was more than fifty years ago that **Bill Haley and the Comets** made music history when they recorded (4/12/54) "Rock Around The Clock," the pulsating rock song that gained popularity on TV's *The Ed Sullivan Show* and as the theme song of a blockbuster movie, *Blackboard Jungle*, starring **Glenn Ford** as a teacher and **Sidney Poitier** as his rebellious student in a New York City high school. The record has since sold a staggering 25 million copies.

Bill Haley and the Comets were not one-hit wonders. Who can forget those hits of the 50s, "Shake, Rattle & Roll" or "See You Later, Alligator." **Haley was born and raised in San Benito, Texas, in the Lower Rio Grande Valley** – also the hometown, by the way, of other music legends **Kris Kristofferson** and **Freddie Fender**. Haley died in 1981 at age 55. But not only does his music live on, so do his five band members who today have a collective age of 380 years. And, man, are they still rockin'.

They play **80 sold-out shows a year** and hold the record for the biggest crowd at the Viper Room on Sunset Strip. **They'll soon kick off a European tour** and, after that, plan to record their first major-label record album in more than 30 years.

These are senior citizens whose most exciting moves should be on the shuffleboard courts. Move over, **Mick Jagger**. **Joey Ambrose** and **Marshall Lytle** are 71. They are the youngsters in The Comets. **Johnny Grande** is 75, **Dick Richards** is 81 and the lead guitarist, **Franny Beecher**, is 83. Their motto is "rock till you drop." Okay, okay, they *are* slowing down a bit. As one of them put it, "It does take us a little longer, you know, those walks in the airport." But if you see five old geezers shuffling through the airport, snapping their fingers, say hi to the oldest rock 'n rollers of them all. And remember the South Texan, Bill Haley, who started it all.

Speaking of aging, **Dr. Louis Overholster** was lamenting the problems of growing older when he uttered "It takes me all day to do what I used to do all day!"

NEAL SPELCE AUSTIN LETTER (ISSN 1071-0612) is published weekly, except last two weeks of the year, for \$150 (plus tax) per year or \$249 (plus tax) for two years. To subscribe, call 512-498-9495. Periodical Postage Paid at Austin, TX 78767 by Austin Letter, Inc., 4105 Bee Creek Rd, Spicewood, TX 78669. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Neal Spelce Austin Letter, P.O. Box 1905, Austin, TX 78767-1905.

Sincerely



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