

TEXAS-sized farewell



The 64th and final season performance of TEXAS will be Saturday night in Palo Duro Canyon State Park, featuring the cast finale and fireworks. This season has been one of the best in the musical drama's history, on stage and at the box office.

Photos courtesy of TEXAS/Wyman Meinzer

37th production ends Saturday; attendance up over last summer

By GREG JAKLEWICZ
Canyon News staff

Blaine Bertrand has some good numbers to share, which in these turbulent times cast by the Enrons and WorldComs of our nation, can be risky business these days.

The president and general manager of the musical drama TEXAS, however, says his accounting is flawless.

What the numbers for the 2002 season show:

- Attendance finally is up, bucking a downward trend that started in the 1990s. Despite having two fewer days in this summer's season, attendance — a projected 78,000 — will be up 2 percent from 2001.

- Attendance is up 6 percent in the 120-mile "local" radius. Bertrand, a former technician on the TEXAS crew who is in his third year in his leadership position, said this season has been the "most exhausting but the most rewarding season" since he arrived in the Palo Duro Canyon area in 1992.

- TEXAS generated \$34 million for the Panhandle economy.

- "One of our goals was to see an increase in local attendance," he



said, noting a rise from 17 percent to 23 percent in ticket sales.

TEXAS concludes its 37th season Saturday night, likely another sell-out at Pioneer Amphitheatre in the nation's second largest

canyonlands. The largest attendance figures were recorded in 1990, when 110,000 saw the show.

Bertrand said that peak came as outdoor dramas became vogue and more senior groups began to orga-

Tour groups, especially those designed for seniors, and visitors from Germany provide a large share of ticket-buyers for TEXAS.

nize and travel to these kinds of events.

"That was the boom in the outdoor drama industry," he said.

To date, more than 3.2 million have seen TEXAS, which debuted in 1966. The show runs six nights a week, skipping Wednesdays.

Bertrand attributes the success to:

- Better promotion, especially to people who live in the tri-state area. Visitors took advantage of a new vacation package that led to more than \$17,000 in bookings at Canyon's Holiday Inn Express (the TEXAS office also handles hotel reservations, barbecue tickets and 16 other area attractions).

(See TEXAS, Page 3)

TEXAS

(Continued from Page 1)

- A production that's more historically accurate, presents more live music and this summer featured three performers in the part of Aunt Anna, one of 10 principal roles in the show — Shirley Fancher, Kathy Kandle and Vicki McLean.

- The nation's desire to return to its roots after last September's terrorist attacks.

This year's show involved 153 people, from the cast and crew to those taking tickets. The first of 64 productions opened June 6 and within two weeks, Bertrand said, the show was tweaked and polished almost to perfection. For example, more than 20 minutes were saved as the show was "cleaned up" to run more smoothly.

"This year, we had one of our most dynamic casts," Bertrand said. And it should've been; about 1,100 tried for roles compared to the usu-

ally 400 hopefuls, he said.

Bertrand hinted at big news ahead for the production known worldwide — visitors from Germany still comprise a large number of ticket-buyers. One change will be the expected arrival in November of new computer software that will aid staff and customers alike. Those wanting to go to the show then will be able to order tickets at home, print them out, get them scanned at the gate and take their seats with minimal effort.

Bertrand said 32 groups have reserved dates for the 2003 season.

"TEXAS is a slice of Americana," he said Tuesday, just days before the close of the season. "When we wave a flag, we wave it conservatively so that it means more."