

Dream vacations, down-home style

August means last call for vacations. With the sun peaking out of the clouds here in East Texas, I am dreaming of sun-swept beaches and turquoise water.

Let's be realistic, however, with school supplies, back-to-school clothes and the price of gasoline, who can afford Acapulco or the Caribbean?

Speaking of the price of gas, why not make a list of places to vacation nearby? With a list, you can work in one mini-vacation before school starts, plan another one for the Labor Day weekend, and finish the list on the weekends as fall rolls into spring.

Destination 1: Tyler State Park

It's hard to find a more beautiful place that so well represents all the variety of trees and foliage that we enjoy here in East Texas.

Our state parks are a great place to camp, picnic, kayak, canoe, fish, hike, go birding, rent paddle boats, take nature tours, or hang a hammock and let everyone else play while you rest.

The staff at Tyler State Park tell me that the swimming is good and the water is only slightly above normal.

Since the 65-acre lake is spring fed and self-contained with no tributaries, they have not had any problems with the water.

They also mentioned Lake Bob Sandlin, Atlanta, and Daingerfield State Parks, all in Northeast Texas, as other great places to visit. According to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Website, there are over 20 State Parks in our area.

Destination 2: Kilgore

Who could resist a small town with the cultural savvy to host a Shakespeare Festival every summer?

While we'll have to wait until summer 2008 to take in the next festival event, Kilgore College hosts other cultural and sporting events throughout the year.

The East Texas Oil Museum, on the KC campus, is an afternoon's worth of interactive exhibits that tell the history of the oil industry in East Texas and allow children to get the flavor of a bygone era, all in air-conditioned comfort.

Don't forget to schedule a meal of ribs at the Country Tavern while you are in the neighborhood.

Destination 3: Shreveport, La.

If big-city excitement is what you are craving, Shreveport, closer than the Metroplex, is an interesting cultural mix of old-world charm and new dynamics.

Some folks go to Shreveport for horse racing or "the boats," a reference to the many casinos along the riverfront.

However, some of Shreveport's best attractions are family-friendly, like the Sci-port Discovery Center and the

CATHY KARRVE



Bullard Banner News

R.W. Norton Museum. Sci-port Discovery Center includes all kinds of exhibits designed with children in mind to explain Louisiana's economy and history; a child with a little imagination can soon be the captain of a riverboat or a biologist preserving wildlife habitats.

The Norton Museum, with its internationally noteworthy collection of western art by Frederic Remington and Charles Russell, is a gem of an art museum and worth a visit to Shreveport all by itself.

Destination 4: Canton and Edom

Why not spend Saturday at First Monday Trades Day?

If you can't make the First Monday weekend, but the sunshine is calling you outside, there is a new water park called Splash Kingdom, situated on I20.

After a hard day of shopping or swimming, retire to one of the many bed and breakfast inns in the area for the night.

Sunday worship in a small town church followed by lunch at The Shed in Edom is a perfect way to spend a leisurely Sunday.

On the way out of town, be sure and stop off at the Blue Moon Nursery to pick up a few plants and some good advice about organic gardening.

Don't go back to work until you have had a chance to get your fingernails dirty by planting something that will be around when the cooler temps arrive in October.

There's nothing like enjoying fall color in your yard to extend that vacation feeling a little longer.

Destination 5: Tyler

It is easy to forget how much fun a few days in Tyler can be, since so many of people have to come to town to work or for doctor's appointments. In fact, there are so many fun things to do in Tyler that next week I am devoting a whole column to that extra long, extra eclectic list.

Just because summer is winding down and the price of gas is up does not rule out a dream vacation, especially when that dream vacation is down home style right here in East Texas.

In the meantime, my next stop is down a waterslide at Splash Kingdom. Yeeehaw! See ya in the sunshine!

Cathy Krafve, aka Checklist Charlie, lives in East Texas with her family. If you would like to add something to one of her lists, she can be reached at features@bullardnews.com.



OPINIONS OF OTHER NEWSPAPERS

House energy bill gets mixed results

The late House Speaker Tip O'Neill famously said all politics is local.

Unfortunately, this condition can have a deleterious effect on national policy, as it did on the energy bill the U.S. House passed Friday.

The House version would provide some of the policies the United States needs to reduce its dependence on foreign oil and lessen an energy crunch when demand exceeds supply.

But it leaves out some of the more obvious and easy steps, primarily raising the mileage standard on cars, light trucks and SUVs.

The Senate version raises fleet mileage requirements to 35 mpg, about a 40 percent increase.

The conference committee should include this necessary conservation measure, despite what one powerful but selfish Democratic committee

THE HOUSTON CHRONICLE

chairman might want.

Republicans are right when they charge that the House bill does nothing to increase the production of oil and gas in the United States.

Democrats correctly counter that oil companies need no government incentive when the price of oil is above \$70 per barrel and trending upward.

However, oil companies desperately need access to oil reserves.

The United States needs to open up exploration off the Atlantic and Pacific coasts — to increase domestic production and cut reliance on wells in the Gulf of Mexico vulnerable to hurricanes.

The House can be proud that its bill requires power producers to get 15

percent of their electricity from renewable sources such as wind.

Texas, rich in wind, would particularly benefit, but so would the nation, which needs to reduce its carbon footprint and curb global warming.

The House also deserves credit for encouraging research into biodiesel and cellulosic ethanol, both more efficient than making ethanol from corn.

The House acted properly in not requiring greater use of inefficiently made ethanol as a vehicle fuel.

Now that both houses of Congress have passed energy packages, a conference committee will try to craft compromise legislation in the fall.

That legislation, should be fashioned to place the national need for more energy, alternative sources and conservation above parochial interests that ill-serve all Americans in the end.

End abuse at schools for mentally retarded

If you read The Dallas Morning News' account last week of unspeakable abuses at Texas' schools for the mentally retarded, you may have thrown up your hands and said something like: "I give. Texas has so many institutional problems — how can we keep them all straight, much less get them fixed?"

But our state leaders can't give in, nor can the staffers who run the schools.

Otherwise, more families will suffer in the way The Dallas Morning News' Emily Ramshaw reported.

Incredibly, a Dallas family's mentally retarded son died from pneumonia after they found him sitting in an open doorway at the Lubbock State School in the dead of winter, partially clothed, soaked with urine and unresponsive.

The school drew legislators' attention earlier this year, but it's hardly the

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only problem.

Ms. Ramshaw reported abuses statewide.

What to do is the perplexing part. We offer five suggestions:

1. The Justice Department should investigate widely. Not just the Lubbock school, where it has made its presence known. Poke around in all state schools.

2. Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst and House Speaker Tom Craddick should appoint an interim committee to examine abuses.

If nothing else, Austin's gaze will pressure staffers to tread carefully.

3. If March rolls around and this problem persists, Gov. Rick Perry should call a special session.

The mentally retarded are a worthier cause than the governor's idea of a special session to divest Texas funds from Iran-linked companies.

It also would allow legislators a chance to invest more in staffing and training. (Austin approved 1,700 new staffers and training after the Lubbock school hit the headlines.)

4. Legislators should give Mr. Perry the power to shut down an out-of-control school.

5. Austin should follow Sen. Judith Zaffirini's lead and make it easier for families to place loved ones in smaller group homes.

The more families can find a humane alternative, the less likely they'll be to discover relatives dying in a doorway in the cold of winter.

Texans are trusting the state with their loved ones. Certainly, the state can't give up until this problem is fixed.

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