



COURTESY OF THE WESTERN HERITAGE MUSEUM

Inside the Lea County Cowboy Hall of Fame Hall.

Art, cowboy culture
and a sense
of community
all come together
in Hobbs

Home on the range

BY GLEN ROSALES
FOR THE JOURNAL

Deep in the heart of southeast New Mexico, Hobbs is the land where high school basketball coach Ralph Tasker became a legend.

But there's more to the little town than a coach of hoop renown.

As a matter of fact, the Western Heritage Museum Lea County Cowboy Hall of Fame (nmjc.edu/museum) "is one of the really good reasons to come to Hobbs," museum director Darrell Beauchamp said.

The institution serves three different purposes in one site on the New Mexico Junior College campus, he said.

There's the hall of fame, which honors the 100 (and growing) rodeo superstars and others important to the sport who have called Lea County home, then there's the museum that recognizes the long ranching heritage in the area, and finally there's the exhibit hall that features an eclectic range of displays.

It started in 1978 as a tribute to the many world champion rodeo performers because "Lea County has more world champion rodeo cowboys than anywhere in the country," Beauchamp said.

In addition to photos of each hall of fame member, the displays include personal memorabilia like saddles or boots or championship buckles.

"And from there it just grew," he said.

The museum exhibits such items as Western buckles, boots, saddles, spurs, butter churns, wagons, tack and other horse gear and photographs of pioneers.

The exhibit area is dedicated to traveling displays on a variety of topics. The ongoing display, "Wicked Plants," through May 1, highlights the world's most diabolical botanicals, without the risk of pain, poisoning, dismemberment or death.

"These are the evil plants of the world," Beauchamp said. "And living in the desert we have many plants that can be evil."

And coming this summer, the traveling Titanic display of artifacts that was in Albuquerque several years ago will be featured.

"We're very excited about that," he said.

The Hobbs Center for the Arts (lccanm.org) is an educational space dedicated to "all aspects of art forms," said director Andrew Arkuko.

There are no permanent displays and different shows rotate through about every two months "because we don't want to get stagnant," he said.

In addition, the center's gift store features work from a number of different local artists, including a featured artist every month.

The current exhibit is a tribute to the work of the NMJC faculty. The multimedia presentation that runs through March 19 includes paintings, photographs, sculptures and ceramics.

The space also is used for cultural events, like an upcoming classical piano concert and a tribute to Black History Month featuring the Langston University Drumline and Dance Team, Arkuko said.

One of the more unusual collections in town resides at Casey's Restaurant (eatcaseys.com), where the walls and display cases are filled and stuffed with endless Coca-Cola items. Everything from trays to puzzles to knickknacks dating back decades are on display.

"My mom just loves Coke," said Paula Manis, one of the owners. "She started collecting in 1985 and people just keep giving her stuff. When people come in, they can see their donation on display."

The collection even caught the idea of company officials, who paid a visit to the restaurant to check it out.

"This isn't even everything," Manis said. "Mom and Dad have a lot more at home."



COURTESY OF THE HOBBS CENTER FOR THE ARTS

The recent New Mexico Junior College Art Faculty Exhibition opening drew plenty of community members.

COURTESY OF THE HOBBS CENTER FOR THE ARTS

The Hobbs Center for the Arts has become a hub for culture in the city.





COURTESY OF CASEY'S RESTAURANT

Casey's Restaurant is a Coca-Cola collector's dream, with one of the largest public collections in the country.

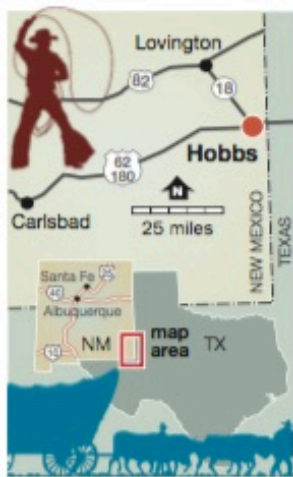


COURTESY OF KENW SPORTSLOOK

Hobbs High School basketball coach Ralph Tasker is a legend in New Mexico and the arena named after him contains many memories from his 49 years coaching.

COURTESY OF THE WESTERN HERITAGE MUSEUM

"Wicked Plants" is on current exhibit through May at the Western Heritage Museum.



C. CUNNINGHAM/JOURNAL

Taco burgers and onion rings and cheeseburgers and fries are some of the fare on the down-home menu.

When it comes to eating, the small and cozy Saxony Club (hobbsfamilyinn.com) is an intimate, old-school eatery that is considered one of the top steakhouses in the state, said Tammy Ross, who has managed the restaurant for 33 years.

Chef Juan "Nick" Prieto uses Black Angus meat and "we cut all the steaks fresh from the slab," Ross says. "And he uses all homemade recipes."

Perhaps best known for the bourbon sauce tipped over

the rib eyes, the restaurant also serves up filets, New York strip and T-bones, Ross says.

"It's been busy ever since I started here," she says.

And for the sports fan, no visit to Hobbs would be complete without a visit to the Ralph Tasker Arena. Tasker, who coached nearly a half-century in the town and is a member of the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, won 1,222 games and 11 state championships with the Eagles.

The arena is a storehouse of Tasker's legacy, with championship basketballs, plaques and mementos from his 49 years at the helm.



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