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Chicken Farm Arts Center: No Foul, But Plenty of Flare

OR

Chicken Farm Arts Center: Where Artists Come to Roost

OR

Chicken Farm Arts Center: There's Plenty to Do Before Flying the Coop

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Nestled near San Angelo's downtown area, the Chicken Farm Arts Center stands out as a colorful, innovative and distinctive addition to the city. Founded in 1971 by Roger Allen, Richard Ramirez, and Bill Rich, the three envisioned a community where local artists could live and work. Since that time, the former chicken farm has been revitalized into a three-acre, multifaceted property that houses shops, a restaurant, and bed and breakfast. It has become a thriving West Texas destination for a great meal, unique find, and hotel chain alternative.

Browse or Buy

The Chicken Farm Arts Center is most known for its eclectic array of shops and galleries that feature artwork, pottery, home goods, jewelry, décor, clothing, outdoor sculpture, and more. Anchored by Roger Allen's acclaimed StarKeeper Gallery, the motto of the complex is to "share the art spirit" which includes not only selling and displaying wares, but providing opportunities for the public to interact and learn from the creators themselves. On average, there are approximately fifteen artisans that can be found within the studios, and additional vendors participate in events throughout the year.

Pioneering the art spirit in San Angelo over 40 years ago, they have cultivated a growing community among artists and art lovers, resulting in the nationally-recognized San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts, a flourishing art program at Angelo State University, several downtown galleries, and various art installations across the city. Additionally, the Center offers tours for students, civic groups, and other organizations. While tours may be customized, they are generally around 30 minutes and include an overview of the property and history, an introduction to the current artists in residence, available opportunities, and information on upcoming events. A behind-the-scenes tour of The StarKeeper Gallery is also featured, giving a glimpse into pottery creation and production.

Come, or Stay, for the Food

Of the ten original chicken farm buildings, it was the grain silo that was converted into a full-service restaurant, making for a one-of-a-kind experience. Owned and operated by Helen and Craig Keith, The Silo House restaurant serves a bistro-style lunch six days per week, and a gourmet five-course dinner by reservation from Thursday through Saturday. The décor is rustic, yet modern, and is accented by works from the Chicken Farm artists, giving the space a cozy and personal vibe. During the cooler months, customers can also warm up near the indoor fireplace.

The menu showcases many local ingredients and changes regularly, but lunch options have included Loaded Potato Soup, Cowboy Quiche, Jalapeno Popper Grilled Cheese sandwich, King Ranch Casserole, Brisket Melt, the Hippie Picnic Sandwich, and the Chicken Farm Salad, ranging from \$4.00 - \$10.00. Foodies with a sweet tooth

will also find an assortment of homemade cakes, tarts, pies, brownies, and ice cream.

Offering an upscale, comfort food selection, the five-course dinner has featured Tomato and Goat Cheese Crostini, Roasted Butternut Squash Soup, Lemon Garlic Shrimp Scampi, Grilled Ribeye with Chimichurri, Bourbon Glazed Pork Chop, Chocolate Cake Bread Pudding, and Pina Colada Cake. Dinner prices vary depending on which entrée is chosen, but generally fall between \$40.00 and \$60.00. The restaurant does not have a liquor license, but patrons are welcome to bring their favorite alcoholic beverages for a small fee.

And for those looking to take home an edible souvenir or gift, the owner's Homemade by Helen label features barbecue sauce, jams, relishes, hot sauce, and other jarred delicacies. The restaurant also hosts private events and on-site catering, and often whips up special menus to celebrate national holidays and events.

Stay a While

While there are plenty of name brand hotel options in the San Angelo area to choose from, the Inn at the Art Center offers an uncommon and striking opportunity to branch out from the norm. The accommodations are about as boutique as you can get, containing only four, distinct spaces, and were once the chicken coops and feed silos. And, of course, the Inn is only a few steps away from the shops and restaurant, creating an all-inclusive environment.

The four lodgings each have their own theme, artwork and personal touches. Decorated with mosaics and murals, The Artist Loft is located in the top portion of the two original feed silos, above the restaurant. The bedroom is located in one silo, while

the other silo contains a sitting area and the bathroom. The Santa Fe room provides a Southwest retreat, while the Country French Room offers a downhome charm. The Ponderosa actually contains two bedrooms, hosting up to four adults, and is decked out with a Civil War-era freckled pecan floor obtained from a Northeast textile factory, complete with musket balls in the boards.

The Breakfast Nook, actually stocked 24/7, is perfect for a morning meal or anytime a snack is needed. Guests will find breakfast items like fresh pastries, cold cereal and eggs, as well as snacks such as yogurt and fruit. Drinks and coffee are also available.

Both out-of-towners and stay-cationers alike have been drawn to the property over the years, desiring a stay that is comfortable and befitting of their personality. And Jerry and Susan Warnell, the innkeepers, excel at hospitality, making guests feel at ease and special during their time at the Inn. Room rates range between \$100.00 and \$165.00 per night.

Mark Your Calendars

Indulging their “share the art spirit” slogan, educating and interacting with the community at large is made a priority through regular events. Some gatherings are small, curated for a rather niche audience, but most fill the artist village and are attended by a cross-section of the public.

There are four main types of events held by the Center. The most frequent is called First Saturdays, which take place on the first Saturday of each month year-round and features local and regional artists and vendors, live music, food and activities for

the kids. Twenty to thirty booths are typically present, which appeal to all tastes and personalities. During warmer months, usually May to October, they hold their 2nd Thursday Concerts in the Yard. Attendees can bring their chairs and enjoy several hours of music across a variety of genres. And their annual Open House is held the Friday, Saturday, and Sunday following Thanksgiving. This is one of their largest events, celebrating both the season and the Chicken Farm Art Center founding. Finally, they hold an annual ceramic weekend in conjunction with the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts and Angelo State University. The three-day event is comprised of workshops, symposiums, and a dinner and dance finale.

While these are the major events that take place on the property, a quick look at their Facebook page or monthly newsletter reveals that there is almost always another special opportunity around the corner that begs a visit with them, whether on-site or around town.

Odds and Ends

The Chicken Farm Arts Center is located at 2505 Martin Luther King in San Angelo, Texas. Galleries are open from Tuesday to Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The artist studio hours vary. And the grounds are always open and free to visitors who wish to look around or visit the studios. Tours, however, must be arranged in advance.

For more information, including restaurant and inn hours, please visit

www.chickenfarmartscenter.com.

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Fort Concho: San Angelo's Foundation Stands Strong
Relive History at Fort Concho
Bringing the Frontier to Life

COPY:

Most cities and towns across Texas have historic buildings, monuments, and districts to visit if you live there, or find yourself passing through, but only a handful still have the actual fort that marks the founding of their community. Considered one of the best-preserved sites of its kind the nation, Fort Concho in San Angelo protects not only the memories of a local society, but an entire way of life.

A Look Back

Established in 1867, the fort was one of many constructed across West Texas to protect pioneers, serve as a strategic point for regional settlements, and map the state's vast territory after the country's population started moving westward after the Civil War. This specific site was chosen for its location near the junction of the three Concho Rivers, as well as proximity to existing mail and stage routes. While it was operational, approximately 400-500 people, including infantry and cavalry troops, officers and their families, as well as other staff occupied the military property.

However, a growing local population, the arrival of the railroad, and fewer conflicts with Indian tribes lessened the need for the fort, and the last troops dutifully marched out in 1889. Originally totaling over 1600 acres, the current historic site sits on

approximately 40 acres of land, with a 10-acre parade ground. And of the more than 40 buildings that stood during its 22-year active period, just 17 of the structures you see today are original, and five others have been rebuilt. Though the Fort Concho Museum is operated by the city of San Angelo, which also provides about 30 percent of the funding, the remaining 70 percent is raised by the board, staff, and volunteers, who have shown time and again that their dedication to this page of history is unwavering.

Finally declared as a national historic landmark in 1961, the restoration of Fort Concho has been in progress almost 90 years, including expanding the exhibits on display and available programs.

Show and Tell

Though located near the heart of downtown San Angelo, Fort Concho is relatively set apart. Much care and effort has been taken to ensure a realistic portrayal of frontier life, and modern advancements like power lines and street signs have been removed or hidden from view for the benefit of the visitor.

The nearby limestone quarry provided much of the building material for the fort's prominent structures. Taken for its convenience and durability, this is undoubtedly one of the reasons that the fort remains standing so long after desertion, since many other forts made from wood no longer exist, or survive only as ruins.

"Folks can come here to get a sense of the scope and scale of a frontier fort, including the building layout and architecture," says Bob Bluthardt, Director of Fort Concho National Historic Landmark. "We have up to 11 buildings with displays open

daily that include a Visitor Center, ongoing exhibits, wagons and artillery pieces, restored soldier barracks with a mess hall, a special display barracks for limited-time exhibitions, restored headquarters, hospital, chapel, officers' quarters, a communications museum, a living history stables with mules, wagons, a Wells Fargo stagecoach, and a classroom dedicated to the Buffalo Soldiers with prints and photos.”

Making the Journey

Open nearly every day of the year, guided and self-guided tours are available as an opportunity to relive history, and at very reasonable prices. Though you should plan your time at the fort accordingly, due to the sheer size of the site. It is quite easy to spend a couple of hours wandering in and out of the historic buildings, which are wheelchair accessible, to imagine what a day in the life of a soldier might have been like. However, power walkers and those on short on time can cover the typical day's open buildings in just over an hour, if they keep moving or create their own highlights tour.

March, April, and the fall are the most pleasant times of the year to make your way there, should you want to steer clear of the infamous West Texas heat. And to remember your trip long after you've gone, a gift shop is also located on the premises, with a wide selection of history books, souvenirs, clothing, and children's items.

Bluthardt also notes, “There are two other historic forts within an hour and a half of Fort Concho, but we have more buildings. And there are 15-20 other historic forts,

sites, or remains of forts in Texas open to the public, but ours is the best preserved with the busiest set of regular programs and services.”

Special Events

While any day is a good day to visit the Fort, there are interesting and educational activities that take place every month to make it an even bigger treat. A few of the happenings you might want to add to your calendar are the Speaker Series, Fort Concho Day, Vintage Base Ball, Fort Concho Calvary Practice, and various summer programs and camps for the kids. Local children can even participate in Frontier School, where entire fourth-grade classes spend the day on-site at the grounds and schoolhouse, experiencing life as the early students did.

And, of course, their annual events and celebrations deserve a special trip, or detour. Held the first weekend of December, Christmas at Old Fort Concho is the largest event of the year, and a beloved local tradition. This three-day occasion features period-style entertainment, shopping, food and beverage, children’s workshops, and of course, plenty of reenactments. In fact, this holiday festival is so big that the fort recommends at least a half day, but preferable a full day, or even two days, to fully take it all in. Other notable festivities and programs include: Buffalo Soldiers Heritage Day (February), Living History Ladies Symposium (March), Frontier Day (April), the U.S. Calvary Association Regional Competition (April), Independence Day at Fort Concho (July 4th), Concho Valley Archaeology Fair (September); and Halloween Night Tours

and Murder Mystery tours (October). As you can see, each month provides a host of memorable opportunities at this one-of-a kind location.

Looking Ahead

Intrinsically tied to San Angelo's past, Fort Concho is an important part of the city's travel and tourism industry. However, to the hard-working staff, dedicated volunteers, generous donors, and devoted fans, it is much more. It represents a part of history that must not be forgotten because it paved the way for where they are today.

And like the early champions of Fort Concho's preservation, led by Ginevra Wood Carson in 1928, they have big plans for its future, which include an expanded and improved visitor center within the next few years. Additionally, Barracks 3 and 4 will be reconstructed with their mess halls, and a new library and research center will be erected. But up first is the renovation of Officers' Quarters 1 in late 2017 and early 2018. No matter when you decide to drop by, there will be ample reasons for this trip back in time.

The Final Word

"Fort Concho represents the origins of this city. It recalls the hard duty and lives of those generations who established a civilization here 150 years ago," states Bluthardt. "By providing a wide range of programs, events, and services to tens of thousands of visitors annually, we honor them by bringing the frontier to life. For many in this community, Fort Concho is a major contributor to our quality of life."

For more information or to plan your trip, please visit www.fortconcho.com.

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From Stood Up to Successful Business
The Way to His Heart Really Was Through His Stomach
The Chocolate Chip Cookies That Built a Life—and a Business
Success By the Dozen

COPY:

Few things turn mature, reasonable adults into giddy, wide-eyed kids faster than fresh-from-the-oven chocolate chip cookies. These gooey confections elicit feelings of comfort, nostalgia, and happiness at a moment's notice. Just ask Tiffany and Leon Chen, co-founders of Tiff's Treats, a bakery and cookie delivery service. Their sugary labor of love couples her long-time flair for baking with his entrepreneurial spirit to create a cookie empire, spanning over 30 locations in three states.

And three words unite their rabid, growing fan base: fresh, warm, and delivered.

Baking Amends

Like all good fairy tales, their love story has had its twists and turns. In fact, it began when Tiffany stood Leon up for a date when they were sophomores at the University of Texas in 1999. Shortly after, Tiffany's mother said she should offer some sort of apology. Being a life-long baker, Tiffany delivered Leon a fresh batch of warm cookies. And in exchange for her apology, Leon presented an idea: this should be a business. And Tiff's Treats was born.

"I'm not a big sweets person, but when I tasted the cookies, I immediately thought they were incredible," declares Leon. "It excited me to think this could be

something people would want because it was something I didn't even know I wanted until I tasted the cookies.”

The two then started baking cookies out of Leon's apartment, taking orders via cellphone, while finishing their college education. After graduation, they decided that this was a business worth pursuing.

The Perfect Recipe

It takes more than a good idea to create a profitable business. It starts with a great product. Beginning with chocolate chip cookies, the company has expanded into a signature collection which also includes chocolate chip pecan, snickerdoodle, peanut butter, peanut butter chocolate chip, white chocolate chip and almond, M&M, sugar, oatmeal raisin, and oatmeal chocolate chip. Warm, fudge brownies are also now on the menu. And you can occasionally find special or seasonal additions available first come, first served.

All recipes were originally handed down from Tiffany's mother, and have been tweaked over time. In fact, it's been a family affair for many years, with Tiffany and her siblings shooting their very first in-home television commercial when she was just 10-years-old, where she starred as the baker, of course.

Though there have been many requests for other products and flavors over the years, Tiffany and Leon are guided by their company's core values. Leon states, “All decisions about our brand must revolve around being the best in the world at warm cookie delivery, which we are. If a new idea doesn't help us in that area, we don't do

it. We added Tiffwich Parties a few years back, where customers can book us for an event to serve our warm cookies with vanilla Blue Bell ice cream in the middle. We also do mini-box favors of Tiff's Treats for weddings and party favors. So, when we do something, it's always related to, or enhances, our position of warm cookie delivery. We do sell companion items like milk, sodas, and pints of ice cream as add-ons but those aren't our core business offerings. We aren't the best in the world at ice cream or milk, so we let someone else do it."

Besides the stellar recipes, the other facet that makes their company unique is that cookies are delivered fresh and warm. Meaning, cookies are not baked until the order is placed. This requires some advanced planning, but the end product is well worth it. Single cookies can, however, be picked up a la carte and on demand in stores.

Sugar Rush

After moving out of the kitchen in Leon's apartment in 2000, Tiff's Treats secured space in the back of an Austin restaurant. But when the business started taking off, they secured their own real estate in 2003, in the form of a converted 1940's bungalow in Central Austin, which is still open today.

To those who know and love Tiff's Treats, expansion might seem like a no-brainer. However, it took some time and persistence by customers to persuade the duo to make the leap. But in 2006, the second Tiff's Treats was opened in Dallas, which was an area that was highly requested and also familiar to the two owners since they grew up in nearby Richardson.

From there, the company has exploded. In just over a decade, Tiff's Treats has more than 30 locations in Texas, Georgia, and Tennessee, and is planning to be nationwide in the next 10 years, with potentially 1,000 stores. That's quite a long way from an apartment kitchen, a circa 1999 cellphone, and dial-up internet!

"Starting, running, and growing this business with Tiff has been one of the most incredible experiences because I got to do this with her, and we are in it together," reflects Leon. "We had so many lows in the beginning, just clawing for survival every single day. We would never have made it except for the fact that we weren't just trying to survive for ourselves, but for each other as well. Now, we have this incredible bond. There is no way this business would have ever made it to this stage without Tiff. Knowing all the literal blood, sweat, and tears that she's been through, and we've been through together, is very special."

Not-So-Secret Ingredients: Fans and Philanthropy

If asked, devotees of Tiff's Treats will happily gush about their favorite flavor—or flavors—as well as the memories surrounding the tasty experience, appropriately called the #WarmCookieMoment. Hundreds of them will even line up hours before a new store opening. At the 30th location opening in Arlington, people brought camping gear and began queuing 26 hours before the doors opened!

Some fans have even gone the extra mile, or literally hundreds of them, becoming unofficial roadies for the brand. At the debut of the Atlanta area store, the first outside of Texas, those at the front of the line announced that they had been at the last

three store openings in San Antonio, Dallas, and Houston. They drove from the Lone Star State to the Peach State specifically for this celebration!

“One of the things that we love most about our jobs is the ability to create happy moments. At the heart of what we do, that is it. We connect people and we deliver moments,” Leon shares. “We have had people use Tiff’s Treats in their proposals, and also to comfort friends and family after a miscarriage. It is a privilege to be able to be in people’s moments, and it’s that connection with our customers that makes us want to give back.”

At every grand opening, a dozen cookies are sold for \$5, rather than the usual \$15. And all sales, not just profits, up to \$5,000 for that day goes to a select local charity. Additionally, the staff who work the openings are often corporate employees and store managers on salary, who provide their time as volunteers for the day. Tiffany, Leon, and the staff all feel like this is the best way to become part of the community, and find that time extremely rewarding.

The Last Bite

When asked if he has been surprised about the success of Tiff’s Treats, Leon says, “We still both feel uncomfortable calling it a ‘success’ or hearing others call it that. In our minds, we aren’t close to being done so the word ‘success’ seems premature. But we are flattered by the love for the brand, and surprised when we open a new store in a new town, and people are already waiting and excited for it.”

No matter how you choose to define success, it is clear that this couple has a

love for each other, their business, and their fans. And that makes any success even sweeter.

For more information and to order your warm cookies, please visit

www.cookieelivery.com.