

Fall Visitor's Guide

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Hardin County



The Silsbee Bee

a Phillips Publishing Community Newspaper

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SARATOGA

GHOST LIGHT

A Texas Night Mystery

by Dylan Busby

The Silsbee Bee

Deep in the heart of East Texas, tucked within the towering pine forests of the Big Thicket, lies one of the region's most enduring mysteries: the ghost light of Saratoga. For decades, these glowing orbs have floated silently along a remote stretch of dirt known as Bragg Road, an eight-mile trail that once served as a railroad corridor

and now invites travelers seeking an eerie, unforgettable adventure. On moonless nights, visitors report seeing a single glowing light hovering in the distance—sometimes moving, sometimes still—always vanishing before it can be reached.

The phenomenon is often compared to the Celtic will-o'-the-wisps, the mysterious

light of European folklore said to lure travelers off their path. Like those legends, the Saratoga light spark both fascination and unease. Locals share countless tales to explain their origin. Some say the light belongs to the lantern of a long-dead railroad brakeman, forever searching for his severed head after a tragic accident. Others



claim the light only appear when the moon is hidden, making the darkest nights the best for a sighting.

Whether it's atmospheric illusion or something more supernatural, the ghost light of Saratoga continues to enchant and mystify. For travelers with a taste for the strange and the unexplained, a nighttime drive down Bragg Road may offer more than just a quiet escape—it might deliver a glimpse into the unknown.

The entrance to one of the most haunted roads in the state of Texas located in Saratoga is often visited at night to investigate the "Light."

believe the forest hides lost Spanish treasure, its ghostly guardians still keeping watch. Stories of phantom Civil War camps and ancient spirits only deepen the sense of mystery that clings to the woods.

Driving Bragg Road at night is an experience all its own. The narrow, sandy path is a straight shot through miles of dense, silent forest with no homes, no signs, and often no other travelers. As headlights fade behind you and shadows stretch across the trail, anticipation builds with every passing tree. Witnesses often describe a soft, distant light hovering low to the ground, sometimes pulsing, sometimes drifting away. Many



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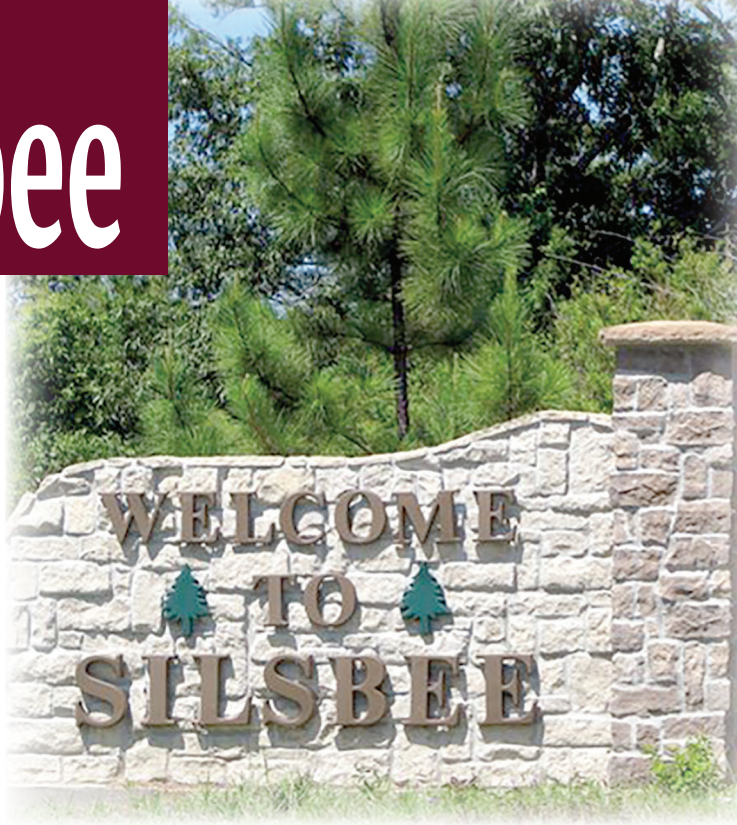
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Silsbee

A Warm Piney Woods Welcome

by Dylan Busby

The Silsbee Bee



Nestled in the piney woods of East Texas, Silsbee offers a true hometown atmosphere with modern conveniences. Visitors drive in through the “Welcome to Silsbee” sign and immediately feel the pace slow down. About 7,000 people call this corner of the Big Thicket home, and the town’s many churches and civic organizations are a testament to its close-knit spirit. Long-time residents often

say it has a friendly atmosphere, and it shows—neighbors wave from porch swings, and weekend barbecues seem to include the whole community. In Silsbee, every face starts to look familiar fast, and the surrounding woods beckon you to relax and stay awhile.

Historic downtown Silsbee invites leisurely strolls through streets lined with specialty shops, boutiques, salons, and a cozy public

library. The Ice House Museum, located in a restored 1920s ice plant, hosts rotating art exhibits, local history displays, and community performances. Nearby, the Silsbee Little Theater—one of the oldest dinner theaters in Texas—offers charming homegrown plays and musicals. Between cultural stops, family-owned cafes and diners serve up hot coffee and homemade pie, with owners who

quickly learn your name and remember your favorite order.

Nature is never far in Silsbee. The city maintains several inviting parks like Knipple Park, Santa Fe Park, and Exquissette Park, each equipped with playgrounds, pavilions, and open space perfect for family outings. Just outside town, Village Creek flows gently through the forest, ideal for paddling, fishing, and peaceful exploration. Its clear waters and towering cypress trees make it a favorite for both locals and visitors. Veterans Memorial Park offers a quiet place for reflection, honoring



the community's proud legacy of service.

What truly sets Silsbee apart is its people. Small businesses thrive on personal connection, and community events—from football games to local festivals—bring everyone together. The Silsbee Bee, the town's long-

time weekly newspaper, captures the rhythm of local life with stories of school achievements, neighborhood gatherings, and heartfelt milestones. Whether you're here for the weekend or thinking about putting down roots, Silsbee makes it easy to feel right at home.

An advertisement for Silsbee Oaks Healthcare. The top half of the ad features the text "Silsbee Oaks Healthcare" in a large, white, cursive font with a black outline. Below this, the tagline "Compassionate care in a place that feels like home." is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The background of the ad is a photograph of a large, modern building with a prominent covered entrance supported by thick columns. In the foreground, there is a large, ornate fountain and some landscaping. The bottom of the ad displays the address and phone number in a large, bold, white font with a black outline.

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Pieces of the past

by Dylan Busby
The Silsbee Bee



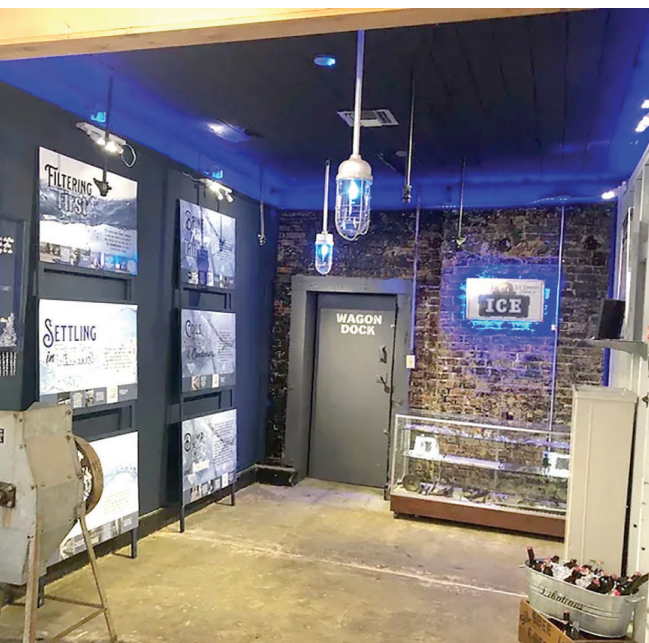
Curator Susan Shine Kilcrease

Nestled in the heart of Silsbee, Texas, the Ice House Museum & Cultural Center offers a rich and engaging journey through Southeast Texas history. Housed in a 1927 brick ice factory that once produced

and shipped tons of ice before the days of refrigeration, the building itself is a piece of living history and stands as a designated Texas Historic Landmark. Today, the museum has been transformed into a

vibrant educational and cultural hub that brings the region's past to life for visitors of all ages.

Among the museum's most treasured artifacts is an original 1863 engraving of the Emancipation Proclamation—a rare and powerful piece of American history that draws visitors from across the region. But the museum's offerings go far beyond a single exhibit. Families can step aboard a full-scale replica of an 1820s river flatboat and imagine what travel along the Neches River was like for early settlers. Children and adults alike will enjoy interactive displays featuring





a 1902 Studebaker ice wagon, a recreated 1920s kitchen, and fossil discoveries including an actual dinosaur bone unearthed from the Neches River.

Local lore and legends are also part of the experience. Exhibits explore everything from pioneer life and Big Thicket wildlife to the area's colorful tales

of Bigfoot sightings. With engaging hands-on learning, the museum serves as a favorite destination for school field trips and curious families.

The museum is also a gathering place for the community, hosting seasonal events and workshops year-round. Popular celebrations like Christmas in the

Big Thicket feature arts and crafts, music, and make-and-take activities for kids. Friendly staff and volunteers are always ready to guide visitors and share stories that make history feel personal and alive.

Located at 818 Earnest Avenue in downtown Silsbee, the Ice House Museum is open Thursday through Saturday and currently offers free admission. Whether you're a history enthusiast, educator, or family looking for a fun and meaningful outing, this cultural landmark offers a warm welcome and a unique window into the heritage of Southeast Texas.

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Lumberton

by Dylan Busby
The Silsbee Bee

Lumberton, Texas is a thriving community in Hardin County that continues to grow while maintaining the warmth and charm of a small town. With a population of over 14,000, the city has seen steady development in recent years, becoming the

largest in the county. Though officially incorporated in 1973, Lumberton's history

dates back to 1894, when it served as a key stop along the Gulf, Beaumont and Kansas City railroad, helping support the area's booming tim-

ber industry. Today, Lumberton offers a mix of natural beauty, family-focused living, and modern convenience. Surrounded by Southeast Texas' lush piney woods,



The Rose House



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the city is home to Village Creek State Park, a 1,090-acre haven for camping, hiking, canoeing, and fishing. Just beyond its borders lies the Big Thicket National Preserve, a nationally protected area known for its rich biodiversity and pristine wilderness. For everyday recreation, residents enjoy the city's newer park facilities, including a spacious city park featuring playgrounds, volleyball courts, disc golf, and walking trails.

The lifestyle in Lumberton appeals to families and newcomers alike, thanks in part to strong public schools within the Lumberton Independent School District and a wide range of youth sports and activities. Community pride shines during local events like the Village Creek Festival, held each October, where residents gather for a weekend of carnival rides, food, crafts, and live entertainment.

Despite its quiet atmosphere and

natural surroundings, Lumberton is conveniently located just 12 miles north of Beaumont, providing easy access to employment, shopping, and health-care. This ideal balance between peaceful living and urban accessibility continues to draw new residents. Whether you're seeking a close-knit community, outdoor adventure, or a fresh start in a growing town, Lumberton welcomes you with open arms and room to grow.



VILLAGE CREEK

Family-Friendly Nature Escape



by Dylan Busby
The Silsbee Bee

Nestled on the edge of the Big Thicket in Lumberton, Texas, Village Creek State Park offers families a refreshing escape into nature with a wide range of outdoor activities suited for all ages. This 1,000-acre park features a free-flowing creek, shaded forests, and well-maintained trails that invite exploration, discovery, and relaxation. The gentle waters of Village Creek are ideal for paddling, with canoes, kayaks, and paddle-boards available for rent. Life jackets are provided, and the calm current makes it safe for even younger children to enjoy floating or splashing along the sandy banks.

Families will find plenty of trails to explore, with over eight miles winding through pine woods, cypress swamps, and sandy ridges. The Lil' Paws Nature Trail is perfect for young hikers, while the Water Oak Loop offers a



longer route through diverse habitats. Interpretive signs and ranger-led walks help families learn about the local wildlife, from woodpeckers and herons to deer and even the occasional alligator, viewed from safe boardwalks and viewing areas.

Village Creek is also a great spot for a picnic, with shaded tables and grills conveniently located near the water. A fenced playground gives kids a safe place to play, and the park store provides snacks, gifts, and basic supplies. Anglers can enjoy fishing from the creek banks, with gear



available to borrow and no license required.

Camping options include tent sites, RV hookups, and a screened shelter that sleeps up to eight, all equipped with fire rings, picnic tables, and access to restrooms and hot showers. After dinner, families can enjoy ranger-led campfire programs or night hikes under the stars. The park also offers Junior Ranger

activity packs and loaner kits with field guides and binoculars, making it easy to turn a day of fun into an educational adventure.

With its peaceful setting, engaging programs, and family-friendly amenities, Village Creek State Park is the perfect destination for travelers seeking outdoor fun, learning, and quality time together in the heart of East Texas.

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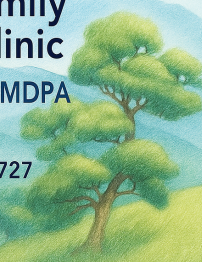
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Hardin County's Scenic Seat

KOUNTZE

Nestled amid towering pines in the heart of Southeast Texas, Kountze is the proud county seat of Hardin County and a hidden gem for travelers seeking small-town charm, natural beauty, and rich heritage. Known as the “Gateway to the Big Thicket,” Kountze blends a welcoming atmosphere with easy access to one of the most ecologically diverse wilderness preserves in the United States.

At the center of town stands the Hardin County Courthouse, a distinctive modern structure that features the domed cupola salvaged from its 1904 predecessor. This courthouse not only anchors the downtown square but also serves as a symbol of the region’s civic pride and enduring legacy. Visitors strolling through the historic downtown will find a selection of quaint shops and local eateries, along with key landmarks like the Museum of Hardin County, housed in a restored 1916 bank building. The museum features artifacts, photographs, and genealogical records that tell the story of the region’s past.

Nearby, the Kirby–Hill House offers a glimpse into the elegance of early 20th-century life. This 1902 Queen Anne mansion, built by lumber magnate James L. Kirby, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places



by Dylan Busby
The Silsbee Bee

and frequently hosts guided tours and special events in its elaborately furnished rooms. Throughout the year, Kountze comes alive with community festivals, parades, and theater performances that highlight the town’s vibrant cultural scene.

Just minutes outside of town, nature lovers can explore the Big Thicket National Preserve, a sprawling sanctuary of over 113,000 acres of forest, wetlands, and waterways. The preserve offers hiking trails, canoe routes, and educational programs, drawing visitors eager to experience its rare plant species, quiet bayous, and wildlife-rich habitats.

After a day of adventure or sightseeing, visitors can relax with

classic Southern cooking at one of Kountze's beloved eateries. From slow-smoked barbecue to hearty country breakfasts, the town serves up authentic flavors alongside its warm hospitality. Whether you're uncovering Texas history, hiking through untamed beauty, or simply enjoying the laid-back pace, Kountze offers an unforgettable retreat in the heart of Hardin County.



Historic Kirby-Hill House

A Small Town's Big Triumphs: KOUNTZE HOOPS

Even by Texas standards, Kountze has a storied basketball history. The boys' 2025 victory marked the program's fifth state title, capping decades of success, while the Lionettes joined that legacy by capturing their first championship after eight prior semifinal appearances. For years, Kountze has built a reputation as a training ground for championship coaches, with alumni like Fred Williams and Andre Boutte going on to win state titles at other schools.

The 2025 season became a defining moment for the town. Both the boys and

girls teams stormed through the playoffs, each dominating their UIL Class 3A-II state final. The Lionettes overwhelmed Paradise with relentless defense and sharp shooting to win 69–40, closing out a 31–3 season. A week later, the Lions claimed a decisive 67–38 win—securing their first boys state title since 2007 and finishing 38–2. In an unprecedented twist, both teams defeated squads from the same school, Paradise High, making Kountze the first Texas school to accomplish such a feat since 1961.

Much of the success came from

homegrown stars. The Lionettes were led by senior guard Keyiona McDaniel, who tallied 19 points and 11 rebounds in the final, earning MVP honors. She was backed by fellow seniors Star Warren and Neosha McMahon, while team captain Jada Skipper provided leadership throughout the season. On the boys side, senior guards Zac Sells and Mason Donald led the scoring with 28 and 23 points, respectively, in the championship game. Sells also added seven steals and earned MVP honors. The teams were guided by strong coaching, with

longtime boys coach Duane Joubert and first-year girls coach Tena Matthews Williams providing the leadership needed to reach the top.

The championship run became a town-wide celebration. Schools closed so students and fans could make the trip to San Antonio, and upon returning, the teams were met with cheering crowds, a hometown parade, and a city draped in red and white. In Kountze, basketball has become a symbol of pride, unity, and tradition. Visitors to this East Texas town will quickly discover that its deep basketball culture is more than a local pastime—it's a championship legacy in motion.

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