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## Rodeo company is cashing in on Texas bucking tradition

**Premium content from San Antonio Business Journal - by Mike W. Thomas**

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The San Antonio Stock Show and Rodeo that will take place next year from Feb. 4-21 at the AT&T Center is guaranteed to have lots of calf roping, bull riding, bronc busting, barrel racing and much more, along with a livestock show, a carnival and big-name country and pop music acts.

But for those who don't get their fill of rodeo fun in February, there is always the Tejas Rodeo every weekend throughout most of the rest of the year.

Tejas Rodeo? Yes, for those unfamiliar, San Antonio is home to a private rodeo company that for the past four years has staged performances at a facility about 10 miles outside of Loop 1604 near Bulverde.

Founded by Yancey James and Trey Martin, former professional rodeo performers, Tejas Rodeo Co. puts on a live rodeo show every Saturday evening from March through November.

The 53-acre facility located at 401 Obst Road features a covered rodeo arena measuring 285 feet by 120 feet that seats about 400 to 500 spectators. There is also a restaurant called the Tejas Smokehouse that serves ribeye steaks, barbecue, hamburgers and hot dogs. The company has a mixed beverage license and serves alcohol at the restaurant.

The seating is outside on picnic tables beneath a 30-foot-by-60-foot covered pavilion with a large fireplace on one side and large oak trees scattered throughout.

The gates open every Saturday at 5 p.m. and the rodeo starts at 7:30 p.m., lasting between one and a half to two hours. Afterwards there is usually live music and country-western dancing.

### **A taste of Texas**

James says that after a 15-year career as a professional bull rider traveling on the rodeo circuit and taking part in more than 650 rodeos, he and Martin decided to start their own business.

"We got to thinking one day that San Antonio is missing this type of experience year round," James says. "We thought this would be a great opportunity and we went ahead with the attitude that 'if you build it, they will come.' "

James says the venture has been successful so far and currently brings in about \$400,000 per year. One area of growth for the business is serving as a host for corporate events and private parties.

"That part of the business has really taken off," James says. "We offer a true taste of Texas that you generally can't find anywhere else most of the time."

Kelly Starr agrees. Starr, executive vice president for Summit Industrial Products in Tyler, was in San Antonio last year attending a conference for the Ross Systems International Users Group when he was tasked with finding an entertainment activity one evening for the 150-plus people attending the convention.

"I was looking for someplace to have a big social event that was kind of unique and had that San Antonio flair when I came across Tejas Rodeo on the Web," Starr says. "It was a great experience, especially for the non-Texans in the group."

Starr says the Tejas leadership did an especially great job with the rodeo, taking the opportunity to educate the group about the history of some of the rodeo events.

"I would highly recommend Tejas Rodeo for groups that are looking for a fun evening event together," he says. "We had our most recent meeting last week in Atlanta and I heard members still talking about how great the rodeo was last year."

This past August, Cornerstone Church took a large group of volunteers out to Tejas Rodeo for a fun day of activities. Steve Dunsil, events director for Cornerstone Church, says there were 700 to 800 people in attendance and they had the whole venue to themselves one Saturday morning.

"I was shocked because it was such a nice venue and I had never heard of it before," Dunsil says. "I liked how authentic it was. They had horse rides and roping activities for the kids and mechanical bull riding for the adults. ... The food was great, too."

Dunsil says James and Martin did a great job setting things up to meet the needs of the large group and were very accommodating. "It was all very convenient and the parking was free."

**Best kept secret**

James says he hears all the time from people that they have the best kept secret in San Antonio. But he is hopeful that as their popularity continues to grow by word-of-mouth, it won't be such a secret in the future.

"We put on a good show," James says. "This is a great place to be entertained and it is cheaper than going out to a movie."

It takes about 10 or 12 people to run the rodeo events and another dozen to staff the restaurant. All work on a contractual basis. Meanwhile, the rodeo performers compete for prizes the same as they do at other rodeo events. They pay an entry fee of about \$60 and whoever wins the event gets the pot of money.

The events featured in the rodeo competitions on most nights include team roping, calf tie-down, barrel racing, bull riding and a calf scramble for the kids. There is even a drill team that performs on some nights and an original trail-drive wagon that gets pulled by a team of horses during the opening ceremonies.

There are about 40 head of horses that are housed at the facility and 20 head of roping cattle. The bulls are shipped in each week and usually come from a rancher in Johnson City.

"We always try to bring in the best quality of animals," James says.

The rodeo performers are sometimes less experienced than one might see at the big rodeo events in San Antonio or Houston. Sometimes more calves will slip by when the lariats miss their targets. Some of the bull rides don't last as long. And some of the horses are not as familiar with the pattern they are supposed to run in the barrel races and will occasionally miss a turn or run the course backwards.

But the overall rodeo experience is the same and what's more, everyone is guaranteed a ground-level seat that puts them right next to the action rather than high up in the rafters of a large auditorium or stadium.

Last year, Tejas Rodeo hosted legendary country singer and San Antonio native George Strait when he chose the local rodeo venue to serve as the backdrop for the music video for his song "Troubador."

James says he hopes the exposure they have been receiving will lead to more interest in rodeo events.

"We have a lot of things out here that are iconic to Texas, but that people living in town don't have easy access to," he says. "So, hopefully they will come out and give us a try."