



Ropin' and ridin' in Bulverde

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Chris Green, a national champion team roper, went into semi-retirement in the late 1990s to raise his sons in Lytle. But whenever the urge to compete surfaces, he need go no farther than the Tejas Rodeo Co. in Bulverde.

"I can't travel as much as I used to," said Green, a four-time qualifier to the National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas. Now, with the cross-county drive, he can race after steers in the evening and be home by 10 p.m.

"It's great to have this in your backyard," Green said.

Tejas Rodeo, nearing the close of its second year in operation, is one of just a few weekly rodeos in Texas. It operated in the spring and fall months in 2006 and again this year. This season's last show is Nov. 17.

Trey Martin, the owner, plans to keep the weekly rodeo going through the summer next year for nine months of continuous events.

"We don't bronco buck, but we do everything else," Martin said.

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Competition includes bull riding, team roping, breakaway roping, calf roping and barrel racing. In the short time Tejas Rodeo has been in business, it has caught the attention of professional cowboys. As cowboys and cowgirls travel to major events, they stop by for a tuneup at the covered arena.

And following the main event, there is food, drink and live country music entertainment to keep visitors spending.

The Saturday rodeos routinely draw crowds of 400, and some nights the steel bleachers hold 750 spectators, Martin said.

"We're using the Mesquite Championship Rodeo as our model," Martin said. "We would like to grow to that size. We don't know if we ever will, but that's our goal."

Mesquite Championship Rodeo remains the gold standard for weekly rodeo and has been a premier tourist attraction in the Dallas area since its opening in 1958. Tejas Rodeo, at 401 Obst Road in Bulverde on the banks of the Cibolo Creek at the Bexar and Comal county line, will have a lot of growing to do to fill those britches.

Martin's rodeo enterprise recently became the subject of an executive MBA accounting class at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Camilla Ritchey, the manager of a nearby bed-and-breakfast and one of the accounting students, suggested that her team study the operation for their project.

"Trey started kind of small, but the way he's grown the thing it's incredible," Ritchey said.

Martin, 44, bought 60 acres of a defunct dairy farm in the 1990s and started the Cibolo Livery Stables Inc., taking in and caring for other people's horses. Through a series of partnerships, he added the Tejas General Store Inc., which

provides livestock feed and equestrian gear, and the Cibolo Smokehouse and Saloon Inc.

A trial lawyer, Martin handles civil disputes during the workweek. But Martin was raised on a ranch, and his longing to live a cowboy's life is fulfilled in the evenings and weekends.

Before the rodeo's opening, the other enterprises brought in gross revenues of about \$55,000 a year. In early 2006, Martin constructed a lighted steel arena to professional rodeo standards and began holding rodeo-related events five nights a week. The main event, however, is the Saturday Open Pro Rodeo for prize money. With the rodeo, gross revenues grew to about \$160,000 in 2006.

Revenues for 2007 are expected to match last year's, Martin said.

"The facility is cash flowing," Martin said. "It is servicing its debt and still allowing for growth. We continue to invest in our infrastructure, which this year includes new ADA-compliant restrooms, Mercado shops, a cedar-shade pavilion, another set of grandstands, upgrades to electrical infrastructure and landscaping."

Naveen Pandrangi, an engineer at Valero Energy Corp. who studied the rodeo with Ritchey, praised Tejas Rodeo's long-term vision.

"They're trying to attract tourists and corporate audiences," Pandrangi said.

"They have a very good handle on their revenue streams and their cost structure. Everyone there believes in a common dream."

Yancey James, Martin's general manager for Tejas Rodeo, is a professional cowboy. He takes pride in the quality of talent that comes through on any given Saturday.

"Some of the best guys in the world come compete," James said. "And the crowds appreciate it. I hear people all the time saying, 'I didn't know this was here. I'm coming back.'"

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Keyword:

Multimedia

See video of the rodeo in action.

Online at: http://www.mysanantonio.com/business/stories/MYSA20071018.01E.NZ.State.Tejas_Rodeo.28ce733.html