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# *Texas Avenue: Rise, Ruin, and Revitalization of Baytown's Downtown*



*Texas Avenue in October 1949, crowded with citizens watching the first annual Baytown Youth Fair and Rodeo. Note the people on the rooftops. The buildings on the right were new.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BAYTOWN HISTORICAL MUSEUM

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**T**he history of Texas Avenue, the once flourishing main street of Baytown, Texas, an industrial community of some sixty thousand located on the Texas Gulf Coast about twenty-five miles east of Houston, Texas, could be likened to that of Sleeping Beauty. Once a vibrant, thriving business district, Texas Avenue fell under the

spell of its enemy, that is, a mall which shifted the downtown center northward. But the residents, who remembered Texas Avenue's former glory, could not tolerate a permanent death. Texas Avenue only slept for a while and, through the citizens' commitment to restoration, the beloved street is slowly waking. If Texas Avenue had been just a place to

shop, perhaps it might have faded away; however, the street has been much more than that to Baytonians. In addition to being a commercial district, it has been a long-time social center.

During the 1920s the discovery of oil near the Goose Creek Stream turned the largely agricultural Baytown area into a boomtown. The increasing population resulting from the petroleum production transformed West Texas Avenue "into a shopping and local gathering area."<sup>1</sup> Due to the oil present in the area, Humble Oil and Refining Company chose Baytown as the site for their new refinery. At this time, Humble was the largest employer in the area. Therefore, most of the store-owners' business was with people in the oil industry. Merchants developed a beneficial symbiotic relationship with the oil workers: Stores were kept open late, sometimes until 10 or 11 o'clock at night, waiting for the workers to come in on paydays, and the customers remained loyal to their favorite stores and sales-people.<sup>2</sup>

Texas Avenue, before the consolidation of the communities of Goose Creek, Pelly, and Baytown (known as the Tri-Cities) into the city of Baytown in the late 1940s, was already the central business district of all three communities.

Commenting on Texas Avenue's retail area, Buck Young, local historian and Pelly native wrote,

Concentrated along a three-block area, the street had practically every type of business a person needed—clothing stores, shoe stores, drug stores,

barber shops, beauty parlors, variety stores, jewelry stores, furniture stores, small groceries, gas stations, cafes, movie theaters, banks, and even a hotel was nearby.<sup>3</sup>

Baytonians have many fond memories of the businesses that occupied Texas Avenue. Pat Mann, who grew up in Baytown, acquired his first Lionel electric train from A. E. Drew's hardware and gift store just after World War II.<sup>4</sup> Baytown *Sun* columnist Wanda Orton recalls that most citizens had their "own personal sales clerks who knew us by name, age, size, and fashion tastes."<sup>5</sup> The eateries on Texas Avenue were always crowded at lunch time. Patrons exchanged information and gossip which bred a close-knit community (and also provided reporters with their best source of story tips).<sup>6</sup>

Besides being the commercial district, Texas Avenue also hosted a score of community activities. High-school football games were an important event in this small town's leisure activities. Dozens of fans vied for the best seats at Memorial Stadium (sometimes standing in line all night long to purchase tickets).<sup>7</sup> Texas Avenue was where the locals would hold their pep rallies, bonfires, and where teenagers would do the "snake dance." Buck Young recalls, "We would form a line and walk up and down the street, in and out of stores, and even pass through automobiles waiting at a red light. People were more tolerant [of others] back then."<sup>8</sup>

Small children even found a niche

on Texas Avenue. At the Goose Creek Library, a story hour was held every Saturday morning. The Brunson Theater also offered special events for boys and girls; on Saturdays, the theater hosted a 'kiddie show' where children watched cartoons, played games, and a few lucky kids took home door prizes. After leaving the theater, many children would walk to Herring's Drug Store or Black's Pharmacy and drink chocolate sodas or eat ice cream sundaes while waiting for parents to finish their shopping. The weekend outings to Texas Avenue were an institution for children and adults

Baytonians would not "get the Christmas spirit until Texas Avenue was decorated and hundreds of colored lights broadcast the Yuletide message" from the three-hundred year (or older) Big Oak Tree at the end of the street.<sup>9</sup> Half the town participated in the annual Christmas parade on Texas Avenue while the other half watched.<sup>10</sup>

Good times on Texas Avenue were not to last, however. What once could have been a street in *It's a Wonderful Life* slowly deteriorated into the bleak, desolate area that movie producers found to

be an appropriate backdrop for *Robocop II*.<sup>11</sup> Jim Kyle, a columnist for the *Baytown Sun*, commented that during this time, anyone looking at Texas Avenue might have had "visions of long soup lines, everyone on food stamps, and each home having a junkyard dog with a lot of flies around the back porches."<sup>12</sup>

So what turned this vibrant commercial center into a business wasteland? As with so many other towns during this period, the most significant factor for the deterioration of the downtown area was the town's population and density growth (see Table below).

As the town grew, shopping centers were built along Highway 146 (later to be named Alexander Drive). Parking places on Texas Avenue were scarce so people began neglecting the downtown area in favor of large parking lots in the shopping centers. The opening of the Baytown-LaPorte tunnel in 1953 and the building of Interstate 10 to the north of Baytown in the late 1950s also contributed to the decline of Texas Avenue. Baytonians suddenly had easy access to Pasadena and Houston and many commuted to the larger cities to do their shopping.<sup>14</sup>

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### POPULATION GROWTH AND DENSITY - CITY OF BAYTOWN

<u>As of Dec. 31</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Area</u>	<u>Population per sq. mile</u>
1950	22,923	10.70 sq. miles	2,142
1960	28,159	13.81 sq. miles	2,039
1970	43,980	26.11 sq. miles	1,684
1980	56,923	28.79 sq. miles	2,001
1988	61,686*	29.58 sq. miles	2,085

\*Working estimate: City Planning Department<sup>13</sup>



*Another view of the 300 block of Texas Avenue taken in February 1997 showing the old Brunson Theater, the old Citizens Bank, and Citizens Savings and Loan. The shabby appearance of the street was just what the producers of Robo Cop II wanted and used in their film.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF  
BUCK YOUNG

Nation-wide discount stores moved to Baytown, pulling customers away from the mom- and pop-owned businesses. Native Baytonian William Broyles, Jr. wrote that due to the new discount stores, "Many of the old outrageous characters who made the [downtown area] unique were replaced by smoother, more polished managers who probably didn't go fishing with dynamite."<sup>15</sup> Another factor in the deterioration was that nearing retirement, owners of many of the family-operated businesses on Texas Avenue just closed their stores instead of selling them. Among the first to leave, Max and Natalie Altman closed their men's and women's specialty shop in 1969 to "do other things."<sup>16</sup> Other Texas Avenue businesses migrated to the new shopping centers. Vacant buildings began appearing up and down Texas Avenue.<sup>17</sup> Baytown began losing its identity of a close-knit community.

Texas Avenue merchants, however, refused to let the beloved street die. In August of 1974, a group of downtown merchants on Texas Avenue developed a

plan for the restoration of the street which was proposed to the Baytown City Council. The proposal, similar to one used in Denison, Texas (located north of Dallas which was about the same size of Baytown) to restore their downtown area, involved building a serpentine curve along the street, creating diagonal parking, and adding outdoor planters and benches.<sup>18</sup> Former Baytown City Manager Fritz Lanham hoped the proposal would "improve the appearance, eliminate parking problems, and encourage building improvements."<sup>19</sup> The renovation which had been successful in Denison was not beneficial to Texas Avenue. However much the aesthetics of the area were improved, other problems remained and new ones formulated. Businesses continued to move out and parking problems persisted. The planters and benches obscured the vision of drivers backing out onto a narrow two-way street. The winding street also caused the Christmas parade to be re-routed.<sup>20</sup>

The Snake, as the serpentine design

came to be called, was attractive to at least one group and it quickly gained a bad reputation.<sup>21</sup> The slow curves and 20-MPH speed limit made the street ideal for cruising. Local teenagers and kids from other cities (some from as far away as Dallas) flocked to Texas Avenue.<sup>22</sup> On weekend nights, Texas Avenue was jammed with cars. There were "fights between kids from rival schools, high-watt stereos blasting AC-DC and Led Zeppelin tapes, and squealing tires and roaring engines. Drugs [were present] and liquor flowed."<sup>23</sup> "Texas [Avenue] was getting an unsavory reputation," said Al Melinger, owner of the Style Shoppe which had been located on Texas Avenue

called in. Former Baytown Police Chief Wayne Henscey said many tax dollars were spent on police overtime to patrol the area at night.<sup>26</sup> Other changes were made as well. Parking on Texas Avenue was prohibited after 10 p.m., liquor consumption was banned, and police occasionally closed the street off and checked for licenses and insurance.<sup>27</sup> Despite the patrolling police, the teenagers still persisted in loitering on the street. Then the City decided to remove the traffic lights and replace them with blinking yellow caution lights to ensure the non-stop flow of traffic.<sup>28</sup> Since the kids were not able to stop and talk with each other, they soon lost interest and moved on to different

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for more than fifty years, and "Some people were afraid to come downtown, even in the daytime."<sup>24</sup>

Word spread, and soon The Snake became the subject of numerous newspaper and magazine articles. According to the Baytown *Sun*, one magazine called it "a passion pit of teenage fantasy and desire."<sup>25</sup> No one ever really knew why the street appealed to the teens. Citizens complained and soon the police were

areas such as Highway 146. After that, Texas Avenue reverted to an almost deserted ghost street.

There has been much speculation as to why the serpentine design worked in Denison, Texas, but not in Baytown. Unlike Baytown, the major reason for Denison's downtown renovation was for purely aesthetic reasons and not due to businesses relocating. Denison's downtown had a 98 percent occupancy rate in

the preceding two to three years.<sup>29</sup> In Baytown at the time of renovation, businesses had already begun to move and continued to do so. Despite the visual improvements to the street, vacant buildings were not kept up by the absentee owners.

Then in 1981, something occurred that further propelled Texas Avenue down the road to ruin. The San Jacinto Mall, with 1.5 million square foot shopping area and 7,800 parking places, opened its doors along Interstate Highway 10 at Garth Road.<sup>30</sup> Now Baytonians did not have to travel to Pasadena or Houston for their shopping; the Mall provided them with access to major retailers, such as Foley's, Montgomery Ward, Mervyn's, Service Merchandise, and many smaller stores that had not been located in Baytown before. Also stores such as Sears, J.C. Penney's, and Beall's, which had operated in Baytown for many years, moved their businesses off Texas Avenue to have larger stores for customers. Then many other businesses relocated to and others appeared on Garth

Road. The center of downtown had now shifted to the north. Texas Avenue became more and more barren of businesses, cars, and customers. A year later, the last big business on Texas Avenue, Citizens Bank and Trust, announced it was moving to the corner of Rollingbrook and Garth.<sup>31</sup> Former Baytown City Manager, Fritz Lanham, believed that the shift of downtown occurred because "the needs of business in terms of buildings and parking requirements had changed over the years" and that "people like to shop in an enclosed area."<sup>32</sup>

However, business owners remaining on Texas Avenue were determined to revive the district. In 1983, they formed the Downtown Action Committee (DAC) whose sole purpose was to rejuvenate Texas Avenue. The DAC proposed to the Baytown City Council their idea of the city hiring a manager who would concentrate solely on the Texas Avenue situation.<sup>33</sup> The main objective of the manager would be to secure low-interest loans for Texas Avenue merchants, while the City gave the property owners a tax-



*Texas Avenue in the 1930s, looking east from the 300 block. On the left side of the street is a garage with gas pumps on the sidewalk. Across the street, two men stand in front of a diner that advertises hamburgers.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE  
BAYTOWN HISTORICAL MUSEUM

break. The Baytown City Hall had their own ideas, though. In 1984, the City Council approved a three-phase study to determine if there was any hope for Texas Avenue. Costing tax-payers \$180,000, this "market analysis and development study was performed by the Arnold Development Company, which had developed Mercado Del Sol (a renovated warehouse that later failed) in Houston."<sup>34</sup> The results of the study concluded there was little hope in the future of Texas Avenue and suggested the city condemn the street and develop the Goose Creek Stream area.

The Arnold Co. study outraged the DAC. They contend that the money used for the study would have been better served for a variety of redevelopment projects. Only a few months before the study was implemented, the DAC had brought before the City Council a woman from Brenham, TX, who had discussed the project that transformed Brenham's downtown area into a profit-making tourist attraction.<sup>35</sup> Yet many council members did not even attend that meeting.

The DAC became disillusioned after many felt the city council was being uncooperative in their goal to revitalize Texas Avenue. After the DAC disbanded in 1986, the downtown area continued to decay. Vacancy rates escalated. Windows were covered with boards. Roofs collapsed. Graffiti prevailed on many empty buildings. Absentee owners neglected to keep their investments neat and attractive. Many buildings considered dangerous were condemned.<sup>36</sup>

Three years later, a new group of concerned merchants and citizens rose to fill the void left by the DAC. The new organization, called the Texas Avenue Committee, met with City Councilman Pete Alfaro to exchange information and ideas on how to save the old district "before it was too late."<sup>37</sup> The committee's suggestions included immediate action to cleaning and painting storefronts, requiring absentee owners to improve the appearance of their property, and having the Texas Avenue area declared an historical district.<sup>38</sup> Later the organization changed its name to the Historic Goose

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*During the summer and fall of 1997, Texas Avenue underwent a face-lift. The curb extensions, planters and benches of the "Snake" project were removed and the street was repaved. The serpentine aspect of the street was retained by painting in the curves. The Brunson Theater was undergoing a restoration and trees were being planted along the sidewalks. Photo taken in June 1998.*

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Creek Association to increase public support to make the downtown area cleaner, to make it more attractive, and to decrease vacancy rates.

The same year that the Historic Goose Creek Association formed, another Baytown organization was diligently pursuing their own dream of an improved Baytown. Recognizing that Baytown needed a new community plan developed, the Chamber of Commerce organized a committee to garner support for professional assistance in developing the master plan from the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Lisa Urban and Zane Wright, co-chairs of the Baytown Steering Committee, had discovered a public service performed by the AIA, in the form of a Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT).<sup>39</sup>

R/UDAT is comprised of experts in city planning, economics, political science, sociology, engineering, landscape design, and other areas who study a community and, addressing the community's specific concerns, prepare recommendations on how the city can best accomplish their goals. Since R/UDAT is a public service, the team's members do not receive compensation for their work; however, the expenses incurred during their visit must be paid by the community.<sup>40</sup> The four-day visit typically costs between \$20,000 - \$25,000 for airfare, car rental, hotel lodging, meals, supplies, etc.<sup>41</sup> The AIA suggests that the cost of the visit be raised through community-wide donations, since that "results in the commitment of many people and avoids the perception that the R/UDAT was 'bought' by any one faction."<sup>42</sup>

The Steering Committee for Baytown R/UDAT immediately went to work preparing an application for the AIA. The application, as directed by the AIA, must contain relevant information about the Baytown community, specific concerns to be addressed, letters indicating community support for R/UDAT, and how the expenses incurred would be financed. Lisa Urban and Zane Wright spoke to many Baytown organizations and used the *Baytown Sun* to appeal for cash and in-kind donations. By the end of November 1989, the Steering Committee had received numerous letters of support from area businesses and citizens (see Appendix A) and donations and pledges in the amount of \$26,690 (see Appendix B). Demonstrating widespread community support, Baytown's application was approved and in June 1990, R/UDAT arrived.

The first one and a half days in Baytown, R/UDAT held public hearings to determine what Baytonians' concerns and future hopes and plans for their community were. The remainder of the visit was spent in studying previous reports, other city documents, and the community itself. Community participation in the R/UDAT report was overwhelming. Baytonians helped guide R/UDAT around town, arranged meeting places, helped with fund-raising, and drafted the final R/UDAT report.<sup>43</sup> At the end of the four days, R/UDAT presented their written report to the public in a town meeting.

One of the specific questions the Steering Committee included in the R/UDAT application was, "Can the estab-

lished trends of deterioration [such as on Texas Avenue] be reversed? Can these areas and buildings be made productive again?"<sup>44</sup> R/UDAT's recommendations regarding Texas Avenue indicated that the city should:

1. Acquire through purchase or condemnation, if necessary, the vacant buildings along Texas Avenue, using Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds.

2. Secure all properties to ensure there is no access into them. The city might also consider—with the help of local artists—beautifying the vacant structures with murals. The serpentine between Pruett and Commerce should remain in the short-term and the street scope should be maintained.

3. Identify with the Baytown and Harris County Historical Societies those properties exhibiting local, state, or national historical significance. Developers who restore the properties as part of its redevelopment may be eligible for an investment tax credit of up to 20%.

4. In the longer term, the City of Baytown, through the Baytown/West Chambers Economic Foundation, must work with a local (or regional) marketing firm or advertising agency to develop a marketing campaign for Texas Avenue to

“sell” it to interested local, regional, state, or national developers. The City should seek donation of the firm's staff costs associated with a campaign, which is more likely to happen if a local firm is used. The marketing campaign must reflect the city's master plan.

5. Start redevelopment on Texas Avenue on a small scale. The first activity of the marketing campaign should be to interest developers in the intersection of Texas Avenue and Main Street. Once the center is taken care of, then development could radiate outward from this intersection. Care must be taken to ensure a critical mass for redevelopment. No business should be allowed to operate in isolation from others.

6. A public amenity, such as a pocket park, could be built at the intersection of the railroad tracks and Market Street.<sup>45</sup>

Guided by R/UDAT, the mayor and city council appointed over forty community members to a Comprehensive Planning Advisory Team (CPAT) to prepare a written report outlining community problems and steps to be taken to solve the problems.<sup>46</sup> To spur business reinvestment in local distressed areas, Baytown applied to the Texas Department of Commerce for designation of two Enterprise Zones (of which the Texas Avenue area was one). Both of the zones received designation on August 6, 1991,

which allowed the City of Baytown to offer special incentives for businesses to locate within the Enterprise Zones.<sup>47</sup> The incentives include:

1. Targeted Investment Support. Increased value of property improved in accordance with the Enterprise Zone Program objectives is exempted from paying City property taxes for a period of five years or until a cumulative tax exemption not to exceed \$15,000 is attained (whichever is less). Total exemption cannot exceed the cost of the improvements. Renovation and new construction are eligible for the exemption benefits.

2. Enterprise Zone Commercial Building Loans. Using the City's CDBG Small Business Revolving Loan Program, funds for cosmetic and code rehabilitation are made available under two new approaches:

50/50 Loan Program. The City will provide fifty percent of the financing (not to exceed \$15,000) necessary to accomplish approved renovations. These funds must be combined with funds attained from conventional financing sources that agree to service the City loan. A fixed interest rate of 4% is charged by the City on a term equal to the conventional lender loan. While a shared first lien position is desired and may be

required, the City may accept a second lien subject only to the participating conventional lender.

100% Loan Program. The City will provide 100% financing (not to exceed \$5,000) at an interest rate of 6% to owners only with a true equity value exceeding \$10,000 in a building with a substantiated market value exceeding \$15,000. Only a first or shared first lien position on the subject will be acceptable to the City. A conventional lender to service the City's loan must be secured by the borrower, subject to the City's approval.

3. Waiver of Fees. The City of Baytown will waive the building permit and water/sewer fees for eligible projects within the Enterprise Zones.

4. Regulatory Relief. Action will be taken to consider granting regulatory relief for private development within the Enterprise Zones. As part of a more focused planning effort, the City will be considering alternative measures to implement this incentive.<sup>48</sup>

By 1994, the commercial revitalization incentives were paying off. Business on Texas Avenue was picking up and vacant buildings were filling up with merchants who were willing to take a chance on Baytown's old downtown. The area was turning into what people said

for years that it could be—a specialty shop haven.<sup>49</sup> Texas Avenue now was the home to many antique shops, a frame shop, a hobby store, a bridal shop, a manicure store, a grocery, a Mexican restaurant, a tea room, and many other businesses.<sup>50</sup>

The boom on Texas Avenue spread to Defee street which runs parallel to Texas. The historic Delmont Hotel, “once graced by foreign dignitaries, movie stars, and famous politicians”, reopened its doors in 1994 as an antique and collectable indoor mall.<sup>51</sup> The Delmont has been restored as near as possible to its former splendor. Although many of the windows needed repair, the original glass was kept and the windows rehung in the old style using wood sills. Where parts of the ceiling or wall board was missing, the owner decided not to refurbish the plaster and instead placed various items in the nooks and crannies, adding an interesting and unique look to the rooms.<sup>52</sup> Brenda Foster, manager of

the new antiques mall, said that during renovation several interesting items were found, such as an antique maid’s cart which is now on display for all to see. They also found a mirror dating in the 1800s.<sup>53</sup> Despite the efforts of the owner and manager of the Delmont Hotel, it has since shut down once again.

Buoyed by the increasing interest in Texas Avenue, the Historic Goose Creek Association began formulating ideas to continue and expand business in the downtown area. In December 1994, the Association implemented a monthly First Saturday event where merchants would peddle their wares outside in front of their shops. This event grew in four months from five vendors showcasing their wares to twenty-five vendors signing up monthly. In addition the customer turnout for the event has steadily increased.<sup>54</sup>

Capitalizing on R/UDAT’s suggestion that Baytown have a community festival celebrating the city’s cultural and historical heritage, the Goose Creek Navy

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*This photo taken in February 1997, shows the serpentine structure along Texas Avenue, with planters and benches sticking out into the street. The old Citizens Bank building on the right was converted into an antique store, and the old Brunson Theater, next door, was deserted. The Morrison Building, on the left with flags above at the front door, had been remodeled into offices and apartments.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF BUCK YOUNG



Foundation sponsored Boomtown Blow Out in October 1995.<sup>55</sup> The Blow Out, held on Texas Avenue along the shores of Goose Creek Stream, showcased a multitude of diverse ethnic musical performers and included events such as a 5K fun run/walk, mud volleyball, honey/money competition, and the scroungiest sneaker contest. The proceeds from the festival benefited Communities in Schools (a school drop-out prevention program) and Baytown beautification projects.<sup>56</sup> Over 1,000 volunteers (called Wildcatters) assisted at the three-day weekend festival.<sup>57</sup> Head Wildcatter Jay Eshbach, owner of Eshbach Retirement Planning, said that the Boomtown Blow Out was "a fun way to bring the community together and have a good time."<sup>58</sup>

Christmas on the Avenue became another activity to garner support for Texas Avenue. Begun in 1995, Christmas on the Avenue has become an annual event. The festival reflects the era of Charles Dickens with storeowners dressed in 19th century costume. Many activities continued over the weekend: Carolers along the street sang Yuletide favorites, and the high school choir and orchestra held an outdoor concert under the big oak tree which is the symbol for Baytown. The first event was attended by over 5,000 people. In 1996, more activities were added to the event's agenda. Open air entertainment, craft and food items, a petting zoo, and pony rides joined the festival. The annual Christmas parade returned to Texas Avenue.<sup>59</sup>

The following summer, the Goose Creek Merchant's Association devised a new plan which they felt would further

increase business on Texas Avenue. They petitioned the City council to straighten the curves, and to remove the planter boxes along with normal street and sidewalk repairs.<sup>60</sup> This idea created much controversy among Baytonians and among members of the Historic Goose Creek Association. One of the Association's members, Linda Koenig, commented that "most people felt that the serpentine design destroyed the market atmosphere of the street."<sup>61</sup> However, Henry Stewart, co-owner of Barbara Henry Frame Shop insists that the downfall of Texas Avenue was not the "snake" but rather the opening of the San Jacinto Mall.<sup>62</sup>

After considering both sides of the controversy, the Baytown city council proposed a compromise. City Manager Bobby Rountree said the plan would maintain the uniqueness of the street "by keeping the serpentine [design] and providing landscaping and greenery via the sidewalks." Also angled parking would be kept on the street. The concessions made to the merchants who wanted to straighten the street would involve the city crews removing the existing planter boxes and concrete extensions that create the curves and then the street would be striped with a serpentine outline to preserve the avenue's curves.<sup>63</sup>

Another recent effort of the Goose Creek Merchant's Association, along with the Historic Goose Creek Association, and Harrison Electric, Inc., is the renovation of the old Brunson Theater which had been closed for over fifteen years. Even though the City of Baytown owns the building as a result of unpaid

back taxes, the city council agreed to let citizens restore the landmark and has even allocated funding within its 1997-98 budget to stabilize the roof.<sup>64</sup>

The Brunson Theater opened its doors on August 23, 1949, with a special inaugural program that included local celebrities and the current Miss Texas. The premiere movie was "*Yes Sir, That's My Baby*" starring Donald O'Connor, Gloria De Haven, and Charles Coburn.<sup>65</sup> During its years of operation, the theater was a favorite social meeting-place for Baytonians of all generations. One Brunson restoration volunteer, Cheryl Torres recalls that "starting when we were six or so, my sister and I would go to Brunson's Saturday kiddie show regularly." Ms. Torres believes that restoring the theater will "help revitalize the downtown area" and that it is a "wonderful way to bring people back to the area."<sup>66</sup>

The Brunson theater holds so many special memories for Baytown residents that finding volunteers for the restoration and locating donations of materials has been easy for the restoration coordinators. Michael Basham, chairman of the merchants association's Downtown Revitalization and Beautification Committee, said that the Committee has not yet been told no for anything that they have asked for from local businesses: Joey's Glass donated glass for the ticket booth, Lowe's donated building materials, and Sherwin-Williams donated paint.<sup>67</sup>

The renovations of the Brunson are expected to take two or more years. Twice a month volunteers meet to clean up the debris left by older occupants and

to do such repair work as can be done before the restoration of the roof. Local restaurants, like Pizza Hut and Going's Barbecue, have been providing food to the volunteers during the clean-up sessions.<sup>68</sup>

After completing the restoration, the Brunson will reopen its doors as a public building and will hold theater productions, symphony performances, as well as the traditional Saturday kiddie shows.<sup>69</sup> The Brunson restoration project, with businesses, citizens, and city officials working together to achieve a common goal, is a perfect example of the special place that the Brunson and Texas Avenue holds in the hearts of Baytonians. With hope and hard work, Texas Avenue is projected to become a prominent social center in Baytown once again.

Like Aurora in *Sleeping Beauty*, the downtown district did indeed fall into a deep sleep for many years. Like the weeds that grew around Aurora's castle, decay grew around stores on Texas Avenue. But also like *Sleeping Beauty*, the street was only dormant, not dead. Modern day princes decided it was time to rescue the beloved street from its extended slumber. Even though Texas Avenue is awake again, recovery is slow. As with any deep sleep, a person first wiggles the fingers, then the toes, then arms and legs, and so on. It takes time before one can fully stand up. The same is true for Texas Avenue: the street has come a long way towards resuscitation but it still has a long way to go.

NOTES

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3. *Ibid.*, 35.
4. Pat Mann, "On the Avenue: Old Downtown District Remembered," *Baytown Sun*, 8 March 1993 (Texas).
5. Wanda Orton, "A Walk in Time Down a Timeless Street," *Baytown Sun*, 10 December 1995.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Preston Pendergrass, "Texas Avenue Busy Center In Old Days," *Baytown Sun*, 4 December 1983.
8. Buck Young, personal interview by author, 29 August 1997.
9. Preston Pendergrass, "Texas Avenue Busy Center In Old Days," *Baytown Sun*, 4 December 1983.
10. Young, *Making of a City*, 36.
11. Cynthia Thomas, "Shop-to-Shop Resuscitation," *Houston Chronicle*, 31 August 1995.
12. Jim Kyle, "City Movin' On," *Baytown Sun*, 7 August 1988.
13. *United States Census* as documented in the R/UDAT application
14. Young, *Making of a City*, 37.
15. William Broyles, Jr., "Baytown Blues," *Texas Monthly*, February 1993.
16. Susan Humphrey, "Shot in Downtown Arm Cured No Ill," *Baytown Sun*, 30 October 1983.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. Young, interview.
21. Susan Humphrey, "Shot in Downtown Arm Cured No Ill," *Baytown Sun*, 30 October 1983.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Gary Murray, "Death of a District," *Reflections*, Summer 1988: 2-5.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Susan Humphrey, "Shot in Downtown Arm Cured No Ill," *Baytown Sun*, 30 October 1983.
26. *Ibid.*
27. Gary Murray, "Death of a District," *Reflections*, Summer 1988: 2-5.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Susan Humphrey, "Shot in Downtown Arm Cured No Ill," *Baytown Sun*, 30 October 1983.
30. Glenn Lewis, "Baytown Planning a Move," *Houston Post*, 25 December 1983.
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. Justin May, "Texas Avenue: Forgotten But Not Gone," *Reflections*, Summer 1987: 11-13.
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*
37. Young, *Making of a City*, 38.
38. *Ibid.*, 38.
39. "What is a R/UDAT," *The Chamber* 29, no. 8 (1989): 1, 6.
40. *Ibid.*
41. Rene Moody, "Regional Design Team Could Help Baytown Plan Future," *Baytown Sun*, 10 October 1989.
42. *Ibid.*
43. Lisa Urban, personal interview by author, 12 January 1998.
44. *Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team Application*, November 1989.
45. *Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team Report*, June 1990.
46. *Comprehensive Plan for City of Baytown*, 1992, page 1.
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48. *Ibid.*, 159 and 161.
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50. *Ibid.*
51. Elizabeth Frochlich, "The In(n) Move with Antiques," *Baytown Sun*, 1 June 1994.
52. *Ibid.*
53. *Ibid.*
54. Brenda Granderson, "First Saturday Event Proving a Success for Historic Goose Creek Association," *Baytown Sun*, 12 March 1995.
55. Jane Howard, "Ready For October's Blow-out?," *Baytown Sun*, 13 September 1995.

56. "'Blow Out' Fun Run Set Early Saturday," *Baytown Sun*, 13 September 1995.

57. Jane Howard, "Ready For October's Blow-out?" *Baytown Sun*, 13 September 1995.

58. Mark Kramer, "A Blow Out Blast," *Baytown Sun*, 24 March 1996.

59. K. Pica Kahn, "Stroll Down the Avenues for Fun in Baytown," *Houston Chronicle*, 9 November 1996.

60. Christian Messa, "The Winding Road: Merchants Say Its Time to Straighten Texas Avenue," *Baytown Sun*, 8 July 1997.

61. Ibid

62. Ibid

63. Christian Messa, "City Officials Hammer Out Texas Avenue Controversy," *Baytown Sun*, 26 July 1997.

64. Christian Messa, "Brunson Revitalization," *Baytown Sun*, 10 October 1997.

65. *Brunson's Opening Day Program*, 23 August 1949.

66. Roxanne Richter, "Brunson Reborn: Baytown Residents Work on Old Movie Theater Restoration," *Houston Chronicle*, 12 November 1997.

67. Michael Basham, personal interview by author, 14 November 1997.

68. Ibid.

69. Ibid.

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## APPENDIX A

### Writers of Letters of Support for R/UDAT

1. U.S. Congressman Jack Fields, 8th Congressional District
2. Texas State Senator Gene Green, 6th Senatorial District
3. City of Baytown, Resolution #1074
4. City Manager Bobby Rountree
5. Baytown Chamber of Commerce
6. Goose Creek Consolidated Independent School District
7. Lee College Board of Trustees
8. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Greater Baytown
9. Lee College President Vivian Blevins
10. Exxon Company USA
11. Exxon Chemical - Baytown Olefins Plant
12. San Jacinto Methodist Hospital
13. Houston Lighting & Power
14. GTE Southwest Inc.
15. San Jacinto Mall
16. The Baytown Sun
17. Holiday Inn
18. Ernestine Bright, Resident
19. Barry Bobbitt, Commercial Realtor
20. B & B Office Supply
21. Citizens Bank & Trust
22. Alice Schoyen, FEMB Civic Association
23. Joyce Woods, West Baytown Civic Association
24. Dick and Brenda Dawson, Residents
25. Dave and Martha Moore, Residents
26. Busch, Hutchison, and Associates, Inc.
27. Angel Brothers Enterprises
28. Charles Conder, Local automobile businessman
29. Entex
30. HCA Gulf Coast Hospital
31. Jane G. Riggs, Service League of Baytown
32. Lakewood Civic Association
33. Bay Area Board of Realtors
34. Kathy Armer, Resident
35. Pilot Club of Baytown
36. Lois Snead, Resident
37. William and Dawn Cooper, Residents
38. Ainsworth & Company
39. Whispering Pines Home Owners Association
40. First Presbyterian Church
41. Janet and Kenny Sibley
42. United Environmental Services
43. Integrated Control Systems, Inc.
44. Richard D. Heyen, Attorney
45. FEMB, Incorporated
46. St. Paul's Lutheran Church
47. Lynchburg Investments
48. Eshbach & Associates
49. Tierra Del Oro, Inc.
50. Super Warehouse Foods
51. Ida Griffith, Resident
52. Mr. and Mrs. W.C. Rogers
53. Ralph B. Pearce, GCCISD
54. James A. "Bitsy" Davis, AIA

Source: Baytown R/UDAT Application

APPENDIX B

Baytown R/UDAT Cash and In-kind Donations

Cash Donations

Richard Heyen, Attorney .....	\$ 25
Whispering Pines Homeowners Association .....	100
SWF 1, Inc. (Eshbach) .....	100
Service League of Baytown .....	120
Ross and Flora Wilhite .....	100
Gulf Coast Hospital .....	1000
Alice Schoyen .....	25
Ernestine Bright .....	25
Paul Edwards .....	25
Baytown Chamber of Commerce .....	1000
Houston Lighting & Power .....	500
Earthman Funeral Home .....	150
C.R. Blakely .....	50
Jean Fuller .....	50
William C. Gilbert .....	20
Bobby Hughes, D.D.S. ....	100
Lakewood Civic Association .....	300
Bay Area Board of Realtors .....	50
FEMB Inc. (Plumwood/Eva Maude Subdivisions) .....	500
William J. Gregory .....	10
Baytown State Bank .....	100
Fritz Lanham .....	100
Mobay Corporation .....	2500
San Jacinto Hospital .....	1000
Baytown Olefins Plant .....	500
San Jacinto Mall .....	500
Hispanic Chamber of Commerce .....	500
Baytown Chemical Plant .....	1000
GTE .....	500
Exxon Refinery USA .....	1000
Red Carpet Realtors .....	100

Total Cash Donations

\$ 12,050

In-kind donations

<u>Contributor</u>	<u>Item(s)</u>	<u>Value</u>
Chick Fil A	meals	\$ 100
Piccadilly Cafeteria	meals	200
Doyle's Deli	meals	100
Prestige West	meals	200
B & B Office Supply	supplies	500
Holiday Inn	lodging	3290
Angel Brothers	airplane	500
VIP Travel	4 airline tickets	3000
Citizens Bank & Trust	1 airline ticket	700
Mendelovitz, Altemus, and Urban	1 airline ticket	700
Houston Lighting & Power	meals	300
Graphic Assurance	printing	3000
Chevron/Gulf, Inc.	meals	200
Exxon Refinery USA	meals	300
Gerace, Andrews, and McQueen	1 airline ticket	700
The Baytown Sun	meals	250
The Keepsake	40 rolls of film & processing	600

Total In-kind donations

\$ 14,640

Grand Total of Funding Sources

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\$ 26,690