

# FRONTIER *Texas!*

625 North First Street ★ Abilene, Texas 79601 ★ Phone: 325.437.2800 ★ Fax: 325.437.2804

---

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**For Release: Tuesday, August 19, 2008; 3:00PM**

Media Contact:

Jeff Salmon, Executive Director, Frontier Texas!

Cell: 325-725-1366

Email: [jeff@frontiertexas.com](mailto:jeff@frontiertexas.com)

## **Frontier Texas! Wins Top State Landscape Award**

ABILENE, TX – The Texas Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) has awarded the 2008 Award of Excellence to Frontier Texas!, a museum and visitor center located in historic downtown Abilene. The project was the only recipient of the award from the overall group of entries submitted to this year’s professional awards program in the State of Texas. The Award of Excellence is given at the discretion of the ASLA jury to any entry representing outstanding achievement in landscape architecture. The Office of Christopher Miller of Dallas was the landscape architect for the project.

Frontier Texas! hosted a press conference today in front of its facility located at 625 North First Street in historic downtown Abilene to announce and unveil the prestigious statewide award. The presentation will include Abilene Mayor Norm Archibald, other city officials and members of the Frontier Texas! board of directors and staff. Staff members from the City of Abilene Parks Division who maintain the landscaping at the facility were presented with plaques thanking them for “beautifully maintaining the grounds at Frontier Texas!”

The 14,000 square-foot facility situated on a 6.4 acre site in downtown Abilene, Texas serves both as the official orientation center for Abilene and the Texas Forts Trail Region and as an interpretive museum focused on the history of west Texas through 1880. The landscape design was the culmination of several years of master planning headed up by Landscape Architect Christopher Miller that sought to re-establish the downtown core of Abilene as a local and regional cultural destination. Located at the eastern edge of downtown, the Frontier Texas! site was envisioned as the prime location for the development of a major cultural institution and the eastern gateway to the re-vitalized downtown area. Prior to the completion of Frontier Texas!, the site was occupied by a scrap metal recycling yard situated at the truncated end of First Street, affording visitors entering Abilene a vista of rusted cars and metal drums as they crested the nearby Martin Luther King Memorial bridge.

The project was conceived of as an allegorical west Texas landscape, incorporating elements of native stone building materials, prairie grasslands and homestead gardening into a lush but water-wise and sustainable design. A palette of over thirty native and adapted perennials, grasses and trees was used to create a water-wise design while at the same time presenting an interesting and viable seasonal environment. Stone from local quarries was used throughout the project to thematically tie the building to the landscape.

The project presents two public faces: the front arrival plaza and gardens and the Parade Ground. The arrival plaza and gardens are oriented around a bronze sculpture of the iconic west Texas buffalo. The piece, commissioned from artist T.D. Kelsey, is the focal point of a stone plaza sited on-axis with the main entry of the building. Contrasting stones bands of red and pink sandstone undulate diagonally across the plaza, recalling images of the waving grasslands of the 1880's west Texas prairie. Surrounding the plaza is a large circular field of native Gulf Muhly grass. The plaza is slightly elevated from the street, thus obscuring the paving from view and giving the illusion of a buffalo wandering on the native prairie. The Gulf Muhly provides a range of interest through three seasons. The clear green foliage of spring and summer transitions into feathery deep pink seed heads in the late fall that appear like a mist over the grass. In winter, the soft golden brown of the grass provides a gentle contrast to the surrounding stonework of the plaza and building. In all, the grasses reflect back on a time when the prairie grassland was the dominant landscape, a time before the advent of cattle ranching and the invasive plant species that were introduced with the arrival of cattle herds from the south.

Adjacent to the plaza are a line of four stone chimney structures. The chimneys are representative of many of the extant ruins of the early frontier forts, but especially nearby Fort Phantom Hill, which was built and destroyed in the early 1850's. Most of the main structures of the historic fort buildings were made of wood and all that remains of them today are the stone chimneys sitting alone like sentinels in the landscape. The chimneys stand alone in the field of Muhly grass, further emphasizing their abandoned nature.

Across from the plaza and adjacent to the front of the building are a series of perennial gardens, allowing the visitor to experience a landscape comprised of a broad range of native and adapted plants suitable to the harsh west Texas environment. The gardens were designed to provide interest throughout the year by incorporating a mix of evergreen groundcover, hardy perennials, herbaceous perennials and shrubs into the palette. Further, the gardens are intended to demonstrate a design aesthetic that can provide a rich looking sustainable landscape, while being sensitive to the scarce water availability in the region. To extend the educational impact of the gardens, bronze markers are

placed to identify the individual plant species. The gardens are divided into three sections, each separated by a decomposed granite path. Along the path are a series of stone blocks, each four feet square. These seat-height “story blocks” are fabricated out of native stone from the nearby leuders limestone quarries. On the surface of each block is inscribed a first-person story or history of one of the many inhabitants of the region during the 1800’s, including recollections from early settlers, buffalo hunters, soldiers and local Indians. The story blocks are arranged thematically, the thread of the stories being woven throughout the garden.

The Parade Ground is located at the rear, being bordered on the west and south by wings of the building. These building elements form the edges of this large open area which is scaled to recall the parade grounds around which the frontier forts were organized. The Parade Ground serves a functional role as well, providing a venue for outdoor concerts and events. On the north side of the grounds, a rough stone wall topped by a wood and steel trellis provides closure and shade. On the east side, a gently sloped levee recalls the linear landforms that define the edges of the west Texas prairie. Functionally, the levee is used to provide event seating and to block views to a nearby water treatment plant. The centerpiece of the Parade Ground is a traditional fort flagpole. Arrayed before the flagpole in military formation is the ‘Phantom Regiment’, an allegorical company of twenty-seven soldiers representative of the diverse backgrounds of the defenders of the 1800’s Texas frontier. Each soldier is commemorated by a granite marker inscribed with the personal information of that soldier and the names of the commanders who served at each of the forts along the Texas Forts Trail.

In the same way that Texas’ early frontier forts established a protective gateway at the edge of western civilization, Frontier Texas has now established itself as a welcoming gateway at the limits of downtown Abilene. The project represents a vital cultural keystone in the re-development of downtown and an important resource for both the city of Abilene and the entire west Texas region.

Frontier Texas! is open Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.. The museum is located at 625 North First Street downtown. Phone (325)437-2800 or visit [www.frontiertexas.com](http://www.frontiertexas.com) for more information.

###