

# CITY SPOTLIGHT...

by Vicki Melde



## Texarkana Convention Center and Hilton Garden Inn— A New Crown Jewel for Texarkana

The foresight of Texarkana, Texas City leadership over five years ago in setting aside 2% of hotel occupancy tax toward a convention center is soon to come to fruition with the development of the Texarkana Convention Center and adjacent Hilton Garden Inn. The fact that the project will be funded through hotel occupancy tax without the investment of even a penny of taxpayers' money is phenomenal. Former Mayor James Bramlett recalled, "For many years, the Council and I had received numerous requests from citizens to consider a convention center for Texarkana. We agreed that Texarkana needed a quality convention center and began the process in 2004 to establish a dedicated fund from which a portion of the hotel taxes paid by visitors would go toward a project like this in the future." Mayor Steve Mayo and the current Council agree and commend them for their vision.

"It is truly the fulfillment of a dream that we will soon be breaking ground on the Texarkana Convention Center. With the completion of the I-30 project in sight at this year's end, Texarkana is poised for even more unparalleled growth. The convention center will be ideal for local events and make Texarkana a destination for state and regional conferences," Mayo stated. "The fact that local Texarkana investors D Hospitality (the Daughertys) are partnering with us gives us full confidence it will be a first-class facility with amenities second to none."

"Having the new convention center and Hilton Garden Inn nearby will certainly be advantageous to all of us with businesses in the area," remarked Bryce Lawrence, owner of Bryce's Cafeteria. "I've known Jack Daugherty for years—he is as good as they come. With the Daugherty family involved in this venture, it's sure to be a success because they work hard and work smart."

D Hospitality's choice of Hilton Garden Inn as their fifth Texarkana hotel was based on its proven record of excellence. Hilton Garden Inn is renowned industry-wide for its superior quality, with the brand achieving the highest ranking in the "Mid-Scale Hotel Chains with Full Service" category in the J.D. Power and Associates North American Hotel Guest Satisfaction Index Study for the seventh time in eight years.

Excitement continues to build as another crucial milestone was reached recently with the selection of the design/build firm for the project. Weis Builders, LLC of Dallas, Texas, has been chosen as the design/Build Team Leader for the joint project. The City of Texarkana, Texas will own the convention center and D Hospitality will own the hotel. D Hospitality has entered into a twenty-year management agreement with the City for the management and maintenance of the convention center to insure consistent quality.

"It was a quite competitive SOQ (Statement of Qualifications) process with fourteen firms from



City Council members Bob Bruggeman, Scott Norton, Tina Veal-Gooch, Mayor Steve Mayo, D Hospitality Principals Brian Daugherty, Jack Daugherty, Mike Daugherty, former Mayor James Bramlett, City Council members Derrick McGary and Josh Davis, and CEO/City Manager Dr. Larry Sullivan. (Ms. Willie Ray was unable to attend.)



across the country vying for this project," CEO/City Manager Dr. Larry Sullivan explained. "Our goal, in close collaboration with D Hospitality, was to select the firm that will deliver a premier quality product in the most cost-effective manner. We are confident that we have found and engaged that firm in Weis Builders."

Brian Daugherty echoed Sullivan's vote of confidence in Weis. "We were quite impressed by the caliber of the firms that participated in the selection process—we had a great field from which to select. Weis is an award-winning firm ("Hilton's Texas Hotels—Best Hotel Award" and "Hilton's Deal of the Year Award") that brings to the table expertise and commitment to quality at all levels of staff."

"We understand that the City of Texarkana and D Hospitality desire to hire a highly qualified and financially capable team that can demonstrate a successful and proven track record," acknowledged Karl Meeks, Vice President of Weis Builders, Inc. "Our Design/Build team has experience with (23) Hilton Garden Inn projects, including convention centers, and have achieved "Hilton Preferred" status. We are pleased to have the opportunity to work with D Hospitality on another outstanding project and look forward to collaboration with the leadership and staff of the City of Texarkana."

The other major component of the Design/Build Team is the architectural firm. Weis has partnered with G2 Architecture/Griggs Group, Inc. of Hurst, Texas, to design this project. "The creative process is always energizing as we strive to tailor each development to the particular community so it is unique yet functional," advised Glenn Griggs, AIA, Lead Architect for the project. "It is our hope that the people of the Texarkana area and their guests at the convention center and Hilton Garden Inn will consider this complex one of Texarkana's crown jewels."

"G2 Architecture is also a 'Hilton Preferred' firm that has experience in designing convention center and hotel projects," Meeks added. "Both of our firms have worked with public/private partnerships such as this collaboration between the City and D Hospitality."

The partnership with the City of Texarkana, D Hospitality, Weis Builders, and G2 Architecture will have three primary phases:

**Phase 1: Programming** (completed in August)

Develop a comprehensive understanding of the project

**Phase 2: Pre-Construction and Approval**

(completion by late September)

Thoroughly define the project/secure final approvals

**Phase 3: Construction** (Groundbreaking December, 2010

with anticipated Grand Opening in Spring, 2012)

Complete the project on schedule and within budget

While nothing is carved in stone at this point, the Texarkana Convention Center is expected to be approximately 20,000 square feet in size. It will serve as a spectacular venue for weddings, non-profit events, and community celebrations with its 12,000 square foot ballroom which will accommodate 1,000 guests for a seated dinner and can be divided into multiple rooms for events of various sizes. A large outdoor patio area will provide additional space for large events. The adjoining Hilton Garden Inn will have approximately 150 rooms and a full service restaurant offering room service.

"Within walking distance of the convention center, Texarkana already has five terrific hotels with over 415 rooms. Now with the Hilton Garden Inn, we will have over 560 hotel rooms in the vicinity. Our hospitality industry will continue to grow by attracting conferences, trade shows, and events that we previously did not have the facilities to accommodate," explained the City's Economic Developer Jerry Sparks. "When visitors come to Texarkana, not only do they stay in our hotels and contribute additional dollars to our hotel occupancy tax base, but they also spend money at our retail locations including restaurants, gas stations, and shopping centers which benefits the entire community."

"The positive impact this venture will have on the Texarkana economy now and well into the future cannot be overstated," Ward 1 Councilmember Derrick McGary shared. "I can't wait to be there as we cut the ribbon to celebrate the Grand Opening of our Texarkana Convention Center and the Hilton Garden Inn."