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For Immediate Release

TEXAS - BEYOND EXPECTATION

A New York couple, Mr. and Mrs. Robert Lavelle, recently made their first visit to Odessa, an oil center in west Texas. Near their hotel, they saw a monumental 7-foot -- counting the ears -- jack rabbit statue.

The couple, possessed of popular notions about Texas, weren't surprised by the statue. But they were surprised to learn that Odessa had a fine symphony orchestra and an authentic reproduction of the original London Globe Theatre of the 16th century where Shakespeare's plays were performed. Odessa's Globe is built to the precise measurements of the London Globe. There was one compromise: Air-conditioning to make it comfortable in Texas weather.

The Globe, which rises somewhat like Camelot on the Odessa College campus, is a gentle sample of the unexpected things visitors will discover prowling around Texas.

Texas does have predicted attractions for the well-read visitor: the longest National Seashore in the United States is at Padre Island near Corpus Christi; four restored Spanish missions stand in San Antonio; Houston's Astrodome is the biggest air-conditioned room in the world. (There is now serious talk about placing an Astrodome-like cap over all of downtown Houston and air-conditioning it.)

There are six geographical divisions in Texas -- the Panhandle-Plains,

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west Texas, central Texas, the Gulf Coast or south Texas, east Texas, and north central Texas.

In west Texas, the Big Bend National Park sprawls along the Rio Grande country -- 800,000 acres of painted deserts and mountains. The Rio Grande River makes its great bend from a normal southeasterly flow to almost due north, spilling through narrow gorges and past 2,000-foot cliffs which shoot straight up over the riverbanks.

The painter and writer, Ludwig Bemelmans, wrote of the Big Bend:

"In a life-time spent in travel, here I came upon the greatest wonder! The mantle of God touches it! It is what Beethoven reached for in music; it is panorama without beginning or end... It will make you breathe deeply whenever you think of it, for you have inhaled eternity!"

Still in west Texas, but outside the Big Bend country, the Davis Mountains contain branches of the University of Texas and Harvard University. On one peak, the University of Texas has two astronomical telescopes, of which one is the third largest in the world. Harvard has a Radio Astronomy Observatory in a trough of the Davis Mountains under an 8,382-foot peak.

Bordering west Texas and the Panhandle-Plains, are the Guadalupe Mountains, the highest in Texas. They rise in harsh splendor almost 6,000 feet above a 3,000-foot high plain. Tucked into the caverns of the Guadalupe are pine forests and green meadows, and the lost trout stream of every fisherman's dream runs through pastel-painted canyons. All this raw beauty has been protected by the formation of a new Guadalupe Mountains National Park.

Outsiders may picture east Texas as strictly prairie country. But it is, in fact, covered with high pine forests, mixed with mast-tall hardwoods. There are four national forests in east Texas, totaling about 650,000 federal acres. Flowering magnolias, dwarf palmettos, and wild orchids nestle on a floor of damp pine needles.

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The hill country of central Texas, north of San Antonio and Austin, stretches over miles of limestone, granite and marble hills. Here are the spring-fed, gurgling streams useful for television commercials and everyday picnics. Most of this pretty real estate will always be ranch country, as the owner families inherit but don't sell. Many of the owners' ancestors who settled the hill country towns in the 1840s were from Germany and Alsace-Lorraine and the French and German influence is reflected in the architecture.

A geographic fault called the Balcones Escarpment bounds the southern sections of the hill country. Most of the early Spanish settlements, such as the one that became the modern city of San Antonio, were begun at the foot of this escarpment to tap massive artesian springs. Natural fountains pour forth about 99 million gallons of water at the San Marcos River in San Marcos. The Aquarena on the river offers swimming performances in an underwater theatre by girls in bikinis (one was even married under water), while glass-bottomed boats glide nearby. A reconstruction of the Mission San Marcos perches atop the cliff, surrounded by live oaks and palm trees.

In south Texas on the Gulf Coast, eighty miles of Padre Island have been designated recently as a National Seashore. Six-foot tarpon or marlin are caught off-shore, crabs are caught on the beach, and surfers may catch the Gulf swells on rented surfboards.

The King Ranch in south Texas, is still the largest working ranch in the United States.

Texas, with her six geographical divisions, has almost as much climatic variety as the entire United States. The Panhandle attains altitudes of almost 5,000 feet, while parts of the ghost town of Study Butte in west Texas sink to desert level. The Lower Rio Grande Valley, more than 800 miles south of the Panhandle, is a 12-month garden of vegetables and citrus fruit.

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Oil wells seem suited to any Texas geography, and dot the entire state.

Texans don't really intend to boast. It's just that "biggest," "best" and "most" seem useful descriptive adjectives.

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