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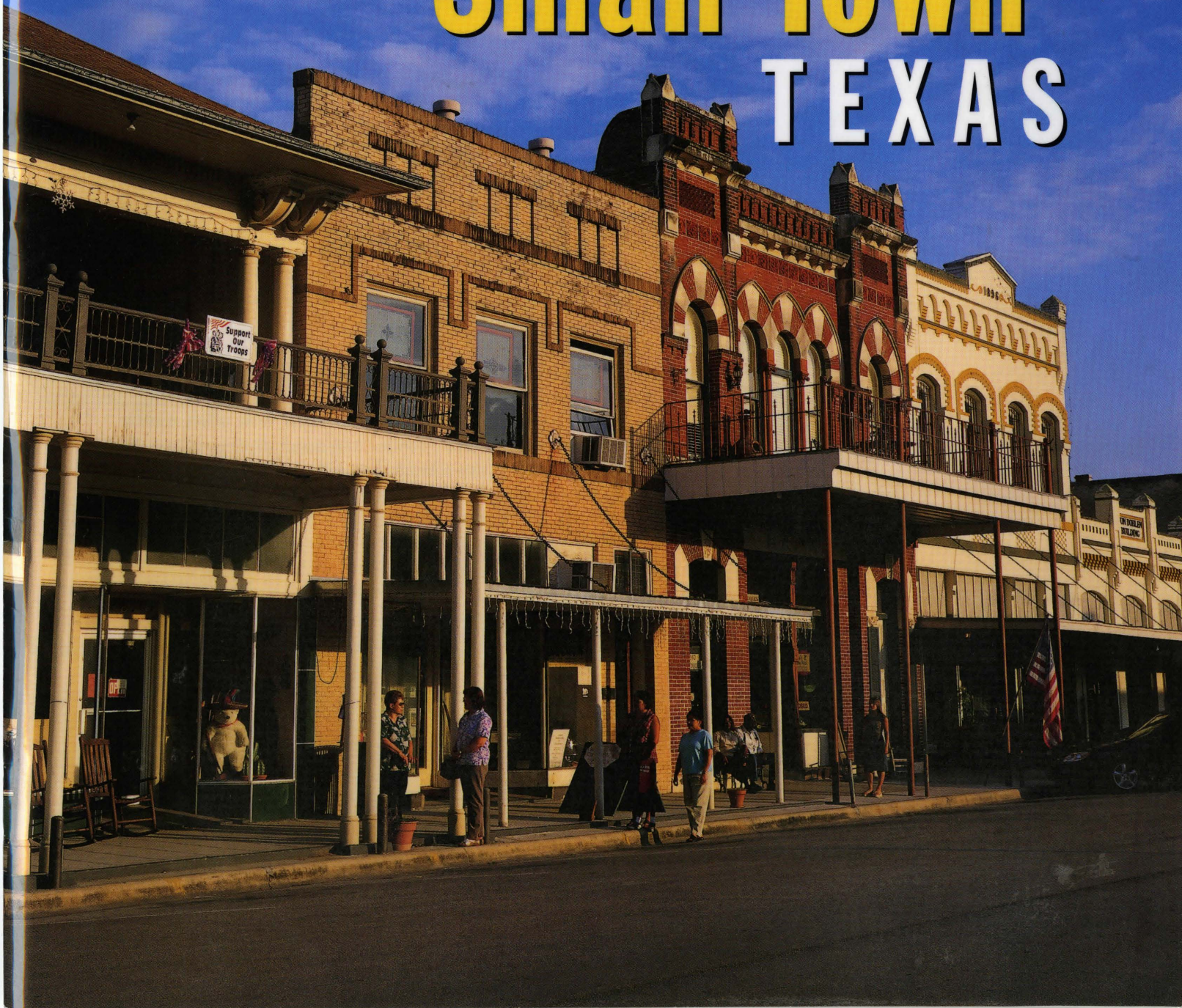
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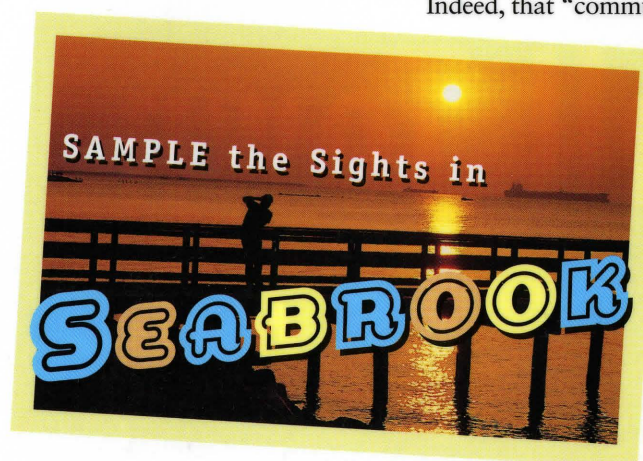
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WELCOME TO **Small Town** TEXAS



BY CAROL BARRINGTON

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
ROBERT MIHOVIL



"Thousands of people drive right by on Texas 146 every day and never know that the quiet paradise called Seabrook is here. Kemah, with its Disney-style boardwalk, is within hailing distance, directly south across the Clear Creek Channel, yet the two towns are as different as night and day."

Seabrook resident Rick Clapp pauses amid the patio tables that front his popular Painted Pelican Café and adds: "We're more like a quaint seaside community—and that's a very enjoyable difference."

Indeed, that "community" encompasses two Seabrooks, one old, one new. Combined, they offer a great day or weekend of activities.

Driving east from the traffic signal where Texas 146 meets NASA Road One immediately drops visitors onto Second Street in Old Seabrook, a Mayberry-like enclave on the north-west shore of Galveston Bay. No glitz, no neon—just narrow, shady streets lined with modest homes and small businesses that seem little touched by our hustling times. As one resident put it: "It's as though a bit of the 1950s has been preserved in some kind of benevolent bubble."

To visitors, that "bubble" delivers a profusion of boutique shopping, intimate B&Bs and eateries, a few art galleries, and a series of quiet sports such as shore and wade fishing, sea kayaking, and birding. Also special: the fish markets and shrimp-boat scene on the wharves at the south end of town (see

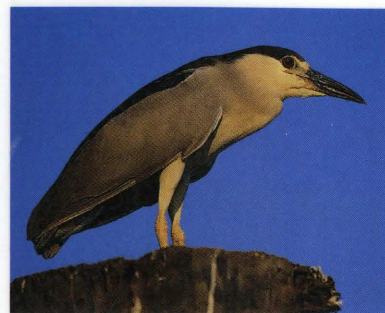
"Shrimp Central," July 2002). Bring a cooler so you can haul home some fresh seafood.

Major development, however, continually expands outside this old section of town. Houston's official metro area includes neighboring Clear Lake; Space Center Houston and the famed Johnson Space Center lie minutes away in Nassau Bay; Kemah's carnival-like development draws huge crowds across the Texas 146 bridge; and the more commercial and franchise-oriented "new" Seabrook lines Texas 146 and NASA Road One.

Brand new: a 100-foot-long paddlewheeler, *The Spirit of Texas*, now offers Sunday cruises on Clear Lake from the Marker One Marina. Additional departures may be added. Two new waterfront restaurants are scheduled to open in this same complex, along with a large patio deck on the water. Such commercial development, however, seemingly leapfrogs over the old part of Seabrook that's known as the Back Bay.

Eco-friendly tourism definitely sets the pace in this town of 9,443 residents. Natural blessings include a diverse habitat of fresh- and salt-water marshes, as well as a combined 11 miles of waterfront on Galveston Bay and Clear Lake. Crabbing is wherever you find it, in season—bring your own line, net, cooler, and bait—and a free public ramp at the south end of Todville Road in Old Seabrook gives boaters immediate access to the Clear Creek Channel, the narrow link between Clear Lake and Galveston Bay.

Interested in quiet-water kayaking? Come here to try it out. This easy, nonstress sport puts you one-on-one with nature, and being physically fit is not a requirement; if you can lift a paddle, you can



A black-crowned night heron surveys the Seabrook scene from its perch on a bay-side pier.

Reprinted from the September 2003 issue of *Texas Highways*



[CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP] Shortly before sunset, Seabrook's waters teem with a lively parade of recreational sailboats, powercraft, shrimpers, and fishing boats. Rick Clapp displays his signature Kemah Lime Pie in front of the patio tables at his Painted Pelican Café. The rising sun backlights a gazebo and trees along Back Bay Lagoon, just off Second Street.

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SEABROOK delivers a profusion of boutique shopping, intimate B&Bs and eateries, a few art galleries, and a series of quiet sports, including sea kayaking, birding, and fishing.

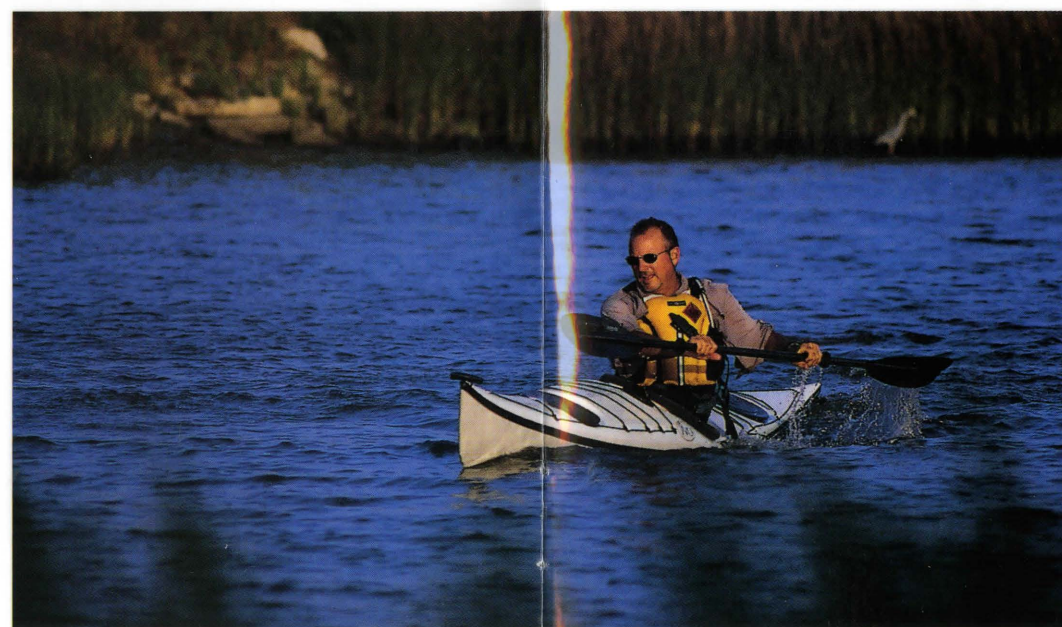
glide into close communion with shorebirds and marine life. Rentals are available locally at Windsurfing Sports, and first-timers often put in at what locals call The Slough, a placid lagoon at the south tip of the Back Bay. Parking is free. There's generally plenty of space under the Texas 146 bridge near the public boat ramp, one block away. FYI: No gasoline-powered craft are allowed on the Back Bay's inland waters.

"Two lagoons off Second Street also are great places for beginning kayakers," points out Seabrook resident Chris Kuhlman, a certified instructor and owner

of Kayak Adventure Quest. That firm's family-friendly "Sea to Seabrook" kayaking trips, offered year round, explore Seabrook's Galveston Bay shoreline and include both birding and kayaking instruction tailored to participants' ability levels. Beginners and families are welcome, and once you've gained some sea-kayaking skills, it's easy to paddle the bay on your own.

Interesting to know: Primarily because of storms and subsidence, half of Seabrook's official 12.5 square miles lie underwater, including an island that's now submerged offshore in Galveston

[TOP AND RIGHT] Seabrook awakens to a fine new day with little traffic and placid waters. Chris Kuhlman, a certified instructor and owner of Kayak Adventure Quest, enjoys ending the day with a vigorous paddle near the shore of Back Bay Lagoon.



Bay. Concerned with preserving the town's remaining lush riparian and upland woodlands, local residents began nearly a decade ago to develop a series of nature parks. An extensive walking/birding/biking trail now links several of those.

Taking local eco-tourism efforts international, Seabrook holds a sister-city relationship with the Galápagos archipelago in Ecuador, working closely with Isla Santa Cruz. "The environmental reputa-

tion of the Galápagos Islands and the ecological interests and sensitivities of Seabrook make for an ideal sister-city relationship," notes former mayor Jack Fryday. In March 2002, Seabrook received a Coastal Community Award from the Texas General Land Office for its longtime work in preserving coastal habitats and for its Wetland Conservation Plan, created in 2000.

Ready to sample those nature parks?

MORE TO EXPLORE: GULF COAST

PORT ARANSAS Free ferries extend Texas 361 from the mainland to this enormously popular fishing village at the north end of Mustang Island. Draws include 18 miles of natural Gulf beach; all types of fishing; horseback riding on the beach; surfing; parasailing; sea kayaking; and biplane rides. A free trolley zips around town, and the University of Texas Marine Science Institute offers self-guided tours of seven Texas-coastal-habitat aquariums. Escape weekend crowds at the new Paradise Pond birding facility or on the new kayaking trails that link town with Mustang Island State Park via Laguna Madre. Call 800/452-6278; www.portaransas.org.

RICHMOND The big draw in Richmond is the Fort Bend Museum, devoted to "Life Along the Brazos from 1820-1930." Guided tours can be requested when you arrive for the John M. Moore House (1883) and the Long-Smith Cottage, the 1840s home of Jane Long, the "Mother of Texas." Both are on the museum grounds. Call 281/342-6478; www.fortbendmuseum.org. (See "R&R in Richmond and Rosenberg," Feb. 2002.)

ROCKPORT-FULTON Known for its concentration of art galleries and shops, Rockport also sports a beautiful, mile-long beach with an extensive playground, hermit-crab watching, picnic cabanas, and quiet water ideal for children. The neighboring harbor is the center of action for fishing charters, crabbing, and boating trips to see the whooping cranes that winter in the area from mid-November through March. Plan to spend time at the Texas Maritime Museum and the Rockport Center for the Arts. Love Victoriana?

Tour the Fulton Mansion, built in 1876 and now protected as a historic structure, and then overnight at either Hoopes House B&B (1890s) or Angel Rose B&B (1881). Call 800/242-0071 or 800/826-6441; www.rockport-fulton.org. (See "Rockport: A Coastal Charmer," May 1999.)

ROSENBERG Don't miss Old Downtown Rosenberg with its Railroad Museum, fresh influx of antique shops and eateries, and the newly developed 164-acre Seabourne Creek Park. Other major reasons to visit include the George Ranch Historical Park (see "Rounding Up History at George Ranch Historical Park," Dec. 2000). For a look at natural Texas complete with wildlife, head for Brazos Bend State Park, a 4,897-acre bottomlands preserve. Call 281/342-5464; www.rosrichchamber.com. (See "R&R in Richmond and Rosenberg," Feb. 2002.)

SOUTH PADRE ISLAND This small resort town draws international attention to the southern tip of Texas. Having only five miles of development and 29 miles of virgin beach makes it a beachcombers' paradise. Gulfside, you can go swimming, surf fishing, beach horseback riding, and parasailing. Quiet waters in Laguna Madre, west of the island, draw kite-boarders and windsurfers (instruction and equipment available) from September through May. Deep-sea fishing gets you out in the Gulf, while a company called Fish Tales specializes in dolphin watches and marine ecology tours in the flat waters of Laguna Madre. South Padre is also famous for Sea Turtle, Inc., an organization devoted to the preservation of endangered sea turtles. Call 800/767-2373; www.sopadre.com. (See "Let's Padre," Oct. 2002.) —CAROL BARRINGTON



[ABOVE AND RIGHT] *The Spirit of Texas* paddlewheeler takes passengers on Sunday cruises from the Marker One Marina on NASA Road One. A six-foot fiberglass pelican is one of 30 whimsical birds of the Pelican Path Project, a plan aimed at attracting more tourists to Seabrook.

Stock up on picnic chow and drinks at Neptune's Subs, and begin your park prowl at Pine Gully Wildlife Preserve. In addition to a nice eating area and access to the walking trail along the marsh (you may spot alligators), this park offers a lengthy fishing pier, wade fishing, crabbing, kayaking, restrooms, and a playground. Lagniappe includes lazing under shady oaks while shrimp boats troll their nets offshore in Galveston Bay.



Pelican House B&B celebrates its Deck the Halls shopping extravaganza during the November 8-9 Back Bay Market. For visitor information and a list of other B&Bs, request a visitors' packet from the City of Seabrook (see Essentials, facing page).

All of Seabrook is a recognized bird sanctuary on the continent's Central Flyway—some 292 species of birds visit this diverse habitat at various times of the year—and five of the town's parks (including Pine Gully) enjoy official recognition as designated sites on the Great

Texas Coastal Birding Trail. You can pick up a birding-list brochure at many town shops.

The sheer number of white pelicans makes this hefty bird Seabrook's mascot. After summering north of the Canada-U.S. border, several hundred of the creatures perch on docks, rocks, and pilings along Seabrook's shoreline from October through mid-April; local wags joke that they "fly back to Canada to avoid the IRS." The formerly en-

dangered brown pelican also roosts here in significant numbers year round, cinching Seabrook's claim as a pelican paradise. McHale Shorebird Viewing Park, at 400 Todville Road and Tenth Street, near the wharves, lives up to its name.

Taking nature's hint, more than 30 fiberglass pelican replicas, each six to eight feet tall, pop up at road intersections and in front of businesses all over town. Each is the unique, colorful creation of an individual Texas artist and part of the Pelican Path Project, a local plan aimed at increasing tourism.

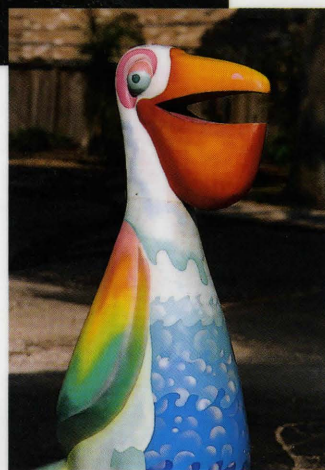
Other such ideas have sparked tourism over the years. In 1993, Seabrook native Marian Kidd jump-started the first Back

Bay Market, an open-air bazaar that continues to draw crowds on the second Saturday and Sunday of every month. Some 40 or more vendors sell an ever-changing variety of items, from antiques to orchids, seashells to stained glass, specialty foods to clothing-as-art. Bead bazaars, art shows, and professional entertainment often add to the market's draw.

When it's time for lunch, walk to either Robyn's Cafe across the street or Rick's Painted Pelican Café, two blocks away. Both offer pleasant outdoor dining when weather permits.

Can't make the next market weekend? Check out the colorful, casual women's clothes any day at the Back Bay Boutique. "Love to shop" folks also hit high cotton at the Seabrook Herb Merchant (live and dried herbs, French-milled soaps, garden and kitchen accessories, and more) and at a brightly painted, whimsical store called Geranium, which carries antiques, folk art, candles, and so on. (If you've been to the Round Top Antique Fair, your nose may recognize Geranium's spicy potpourri from previous sniffs; Geranium's creator, Joy Jowell, sets up big tubs of these fragrant mixes in front of Round Top's Rifle Hall during those April and October events.)

Five other Back Bay shops offer antiques and collectibles, and another enterprise called Junk Junkies defines itself as "the Garage Saler's Utopia." Love gardening?



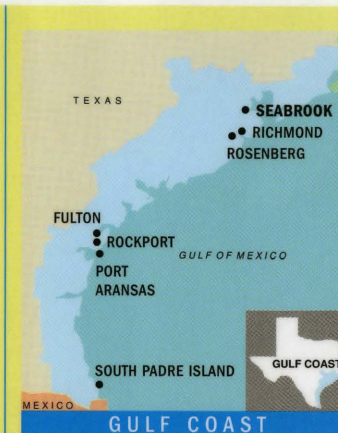
ESSENTIALS Seabrook

LOCATED on both Galveston Bay and Clear Lake, Seabrook lies approximately 26 miles southeast of central Houston and 7 miles east of Interstate 45 via NASA Road One. For information on attractions, lodgings, events, and restaurants, request a visitors' packet from Seabrook City Hall, 1700 First St., 77586; 281/291-5600; www.seabrooktourism.com. For sites mentioned below, call regarding hours, rates, and wheelchair accessibility. **Unless otherwise noted, the area code is 281; the zip code is 77586.**

Rick's Painted Pelican Café, 1405 Second St., opens for lunch daily and breakfast Fri-Sun. Specialties include salads, sandwiches, homemade soups, low-carb entrées, coffees, and Kemah Lime Pie. Call 291-8263.

Sunday cruises on Clear Lake aboard *The Spirit of Texas* paddlewheeler last about 2 hours and cost \$10 per person. Contact Marker One Marina, 3101 NASA Road One, 832/364-4000, for departure times and reservations.

Windsurfing Sports, 2300 NASA Road One, rents single sea kayaks for \$10 per hour, \$35 per day, and tandem (2-person) kayaks for \$15 per hour, \$50 per day. Paddles, backrest, and life preserver are included in the fee, as is use of a temporary, roof-supported haul rack that fits most vehicles. If you prefer, you can launch on Clear Lake across the street from the shop. Call 291-9199; www.windsurfsports.com.



Kayaking instruction with Chris Kuhlman at **Kayak Adventure Quest** ranges from \$45 for a 4-hour introduction to paddling, to \$75 for 7-hour classes at various levels of expertise (basic to open-water). Rental of a properly equipped kayak is an additional \$40-\$70 per person. The 2-day (Fri-Sun) "Sea to Seabrook" trip includes all meals, local B&B lodging, and 2 full days of paddling, including instruction, boats, and gear. Cost is \$575 per person (double) and \$875 per person (single), with discounts for groups of 6 or more. Transfers between Seabrook and Hobby Airport can be arranged. Write to 1002 Todville Rd.; 474-2333; www.kayakadventurequest.com.

Neptune's Subs, a local favorite for its huge and tasty submarine sandwiches, opens Mon-Sat at 1917 Texas 146. Call 474-3973.

Pine Gully Wildlife Preserve is at the end of Pine Gully Rd., approximately 2 miles north of Second St. via Todville Rd. Admission: \$2 per car

for Seabrook residents, \$5 per car for nonresidents. Open daylight hours year round.

A colorful book detailing the **Pelican Path Project** can be ordered through the Web site, www.pelicanpathproject.com. Cost is \$10, plus \$2 for mailing and handling.

The **Back Bay Market** takes place on the second Sat-Sun of the month (except Aug.) under spreading oaks in a square bounded by Fourth, Fifth, and Hardesty sts. Admission is free except during Oktobayfest (Oct. 10-11, 2003), which celebrates Texas' German heritage with authentic food, music, and drink, and the Back Bay area turns into a Bavarian village. The Sep. Back Bay Market (Sep. 13-14, 2003) has a special "Seabrook in September" theme that includes additional arts, crafts, music, and a special bead bazaar. Christmas items will be featured at both the Nov. and Dec. markets (Nov. 8-9 and Dec. 13-14) as well as a special market Fri-Sun of Thanksgiving weekend. Additionally, the Nov. 8-9 market coincides with the Second Street Art Show, an event that's repeated in April. Market hours: Sat 9-5, Sun 11-5. Call 474-3869; www.backbaybnb.com.

Robyn's Cafe opens Tue-Sat for lunch, Fri-Sat evenings for dinner. Lunch specialties include lump white crab cakes and jumbo shrimp salads; dinners expand to filet mignon, fresh snapper, and specials. At 1402 Fifth St.; 291-7212.

Back Bay Boutique opens daily. At 1320 Fifth St.; 474-3869.

The **Seabrook Herb Merchant** opens daily. At Fourth and Hall sts.; 474-1109.

Geranium opens Thu-Sun. At 1301 Second St.; 474-2882.

Junk Junkies opens Wed-Sat and on the second Sun of the month. At 1506 Second St.; 474-7422.

Maas Nursery opens daily at 2 locations: a 14-acre wonderland at 5511 Todville Rd. (near Pine Gully Wildlife Preserve) and a smaller retail outlet at 1717 Second St. (near Texas 146). Call 474-2488.

UPCOMING EVENTS In addition to the Back Bay Market events already noted, Seabrook hosts the annual **Seabrook Music Festival** (Oct. 2-5, 2003) at the local Festival Park. Highlights include 3 concert stages, a carnival, fun run, cookoff, trail ride, games, and assorted arts and crafts. Call 474-3838.

Deck the Halls, at Pelican House B&B, runs concurrently with the Nov. 8-9 Back Bay Market. This quaint house by the bay is stuffed to the ceilings with holiday items, and everything is for sale. You get a basket when you come in the front door and pay when you go out the back. At 1302 First St.; 474-5295; www.pelicanhouse.com.

The first weekend of May (May 1-2, 2004) marks the 9th annual **Keels & Wheels Concours d'Elegance**, a major show of vintage boats and classic cars held at the Lakewood Yacht Club. Details at [woodenkeels-classicwheels.com](http://www.woodenkeels-classicwheels.com).

The grounds of Maas Nursery on Todville Road hold so many rare and unusual plants that folks tend to wander for hours, explorers in a colorful jungle. Variety aside, the surprising thing about shopping in Old Seabrook is that it's seldom crowded. Come here on a weekday, and you may have things nearly to yourself.

Local dining proves equally distinctive. Individuals, not corporations, own the majority of the eateries, and most of the chefs buy their fish fresh daily from

Seabrook's waterfront markets. If you ask a local resident where to eat, be ready to make a very long list.

Whatever else you do in Seabrook, don't miss dining at one of its waterfront restaurants, preferably outside if the weather cooperates. The passing scene's a memory-maker: Seabirds call and soar in the offshore breeze, sailboats tack on Clear Lake, and nearly everything that floats parades back and forth through the Clear Creek Channel. Arrive near sunset, and it's definitely a

"right time, right place" experience, one that will keep you coming back to enjoy this entertaining small town again and again. ★

CAROL BARRINGTON has been a *Texas Highways* contributor for some two decades. She is a past president of the Society of American Travel Writers.

Photojournalist ROBERT MIHOVIL was honored by the Galveston Chamber of Commerce last year with the Renaissance Award for his exemplary service in bringing national recognition to historic Galveston Island.

