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MYSA

Tuesday, January 8, 2019 | Section D | San Antonio Express-News | ExpressNews.com and mySA.com



Fans enjoy live music at the sixth annual Blues Festival in 2013, one of than 300 shows and events held in Luckenbach each year.

'The Center of the Universe' tells the story of Luckenbach

Daughter of its co-owner writes history of town where ain't nobody feelin' no pain

By Richard A. Marini
STAFF WRITER

For most Texans — native-born and, like the bumper sticker says, those who got here as quick as they could — the little town of Luckenbach holds a special place in the heart.

The Hill Country Brigadoon is where, 40 years ago, the alchemy of independence, artistic freedom and music combined to create a once-in-a-lifetime burst of creativity highlighted by Jerry Jeff Walker's classic album "Viva Terlingua!" in 1973, followed four years later by Waylon Jennings' crossover ode to the place of mind, "Luckenbach, Texas (Back to the Basics of Love)."

But Becky Crouch Patterson sees more than that in the town that bills itself as The Center of the Universe but is really just 10 miles southeast of Fredericksburg. A fifth-generation Texan, she's the daughter of legendary iconoclast Hondo Crouch who, with partner Guich Koock, purchased the town, lock, stock and post office, for \$29,000 in 1970.

Book reading and signing

Who: Author Becky Crouch Patterson

What: "Luckenbach Texas — The Center of the Universe"

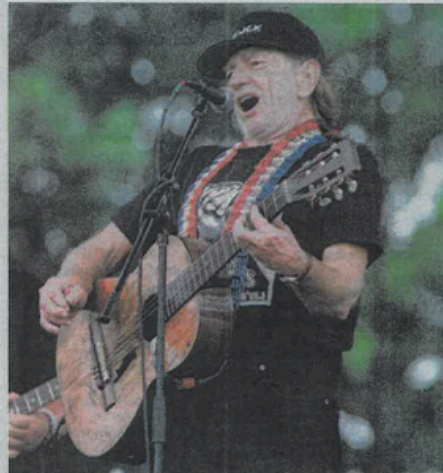
When: 5 p.m. today

Where: The Twig Book Shop, 305 Pearl Parkway

From what singer-songwriter Bob Livingston called her "bird's-eye view of all things Luckenbach," Patterson recently self-published "Luckenbach Texas — The Center of the Universe," a fascinating and funny — if scatter-shot — history of the town where everybody's somebody.

The book tells the town's story from its earliest days as a center of German-American intellectualism through the mid-'70s outlaw country revolution to more recent efforts by Hondo Crouch's sister and grandson, who now own the town, to keep alive what Waylon and Willie and the boys began.

Patterson wrote the book in Luckenbach continues on D6



Kin Man Hui / Staff file photo

Willie Nelson, shown at his 1998 Fourth of July Picnic, led the outlaw country revolution that made Luckenbach famous.

Luckenbach

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Becky Crouch Patterson

Recording "Viva Luckenbach" are the Gonzo Compadres — from left, Lloyd Maines, Bob Livingston, Freddie Kre, Gary P. Nunn, Jerry Jeff Walker and John Innon.

LUCKENBACH

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conjunction with the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum's ongoing exhibit "Outlaws & Armadillos: Country's Roaring '70s," which pays tribute to the Outlaw Texas Music scene that reached its apogee in Luckenbach during the disco decade of the '70s.

But she also wrote it to capture the stories of this part of the Hill Country before they're lost forever. Stories of the people who helped create the free-spirited vibe that imbues the place and of those who settled the area long before the first pickers' circle.

"There's never been a book that covers all the history of Luckenbach," Patterson said. "There's an outlaw attitude that's been there since the place was first settled in 1850."

That was when Germans known as "Freethinkers" arrived to found Luckenbach, as well as several other nearby towns, including Sisterdale, Comfort and Bear Creek. This group, Patterson writes, was different from the Germans who, beginning in 1845, landed around Fredericksburg.

"The earlier group, the largest group, was made up mostly of craftsmen, tradesmen, beer and wine makers," she said. "They left Germany because they couldn't make a living. But the Freethinkers, which included my ancestors, were revolutionaries and intellectuals, philosophers and professors. They left because they were being persecuted, jailed and tortured."

They also were abolitionists and Union sympathizers, putting them in direct conflict with the rest of Texas, which joined the Confederacy in the run-up to the Civil War.

A group of vigilantes called the Hangebund ("hanging band"), for example, terrorized the citizenry throughout the region. And in what's known as the 1852 Battle of the Nueces, Unionists who'd refused to pledge allegiance to the Confederacy and were leaving the state under safe-passage terms set forth by the governor were ambushed by mounted Confederate soldiers, with at least 30 killed in the melee.

But there are plenty of happier stories in the book, too, many that capture the unique flavor of Luckenbach. She tells of the time Crouch went on "To Tell the Truth" and none of panelists correctly identified him as the "Mayor of Luckenbach, population 3."

Or the time Koock went on the



Luckenbach, famous for its dance hall, was founded as a center of German-American intellectualism in the mid-1800s.

Tom Reel / Staff file photo



Becky Crouch Patterson

In 1970, Hondo Crouch and Guich Koock purchased Luckenbach lock, stock and post office for \$29,000.

"The Tonight Show" and, putting his finger and a string on the spot on a globe where Luckenbach was located, wrapped the string around the globe until it returned to the original spot and, some-

how declared this proof that Luckenbach truly is "the center of the universe."

Then there was the time in 1975 when Willie Nelson came to town not to perform, but to play in the



Becky Crouch Patterson

Becky Crouch Patterson wrote "Luckenbach, Texas — The Center of the Universe."

inaugural Luckenbach Domino Tournament. So many people showed up (Patterson estimates 2,000), "you couldn't find a parking spot within 2 miles in any direction" and "people were

hanging out of the trees over the little domino table outside."

She also sketches portraits of many of the Luckenbach Regulars, still here and gone, who helped make the town what it is, including "Sheriff" and bartender Marge Mueller; fire marshal, chicken farmer and singer Jimmy Lee Jones; ambassador and one-man-band Virgil Holdman; and chief of security Zip Zimmerman.

The star of the book, of course, is Hondo, as Patterson refers to her father. Although he died in 1976, his legacy lives on throughout the book. An apparent country bumpkin on the outside, he was, Patterson writes, actually sophisticated, educated and genteel. "Hondo was as talented as the star entertainers, yet totally uncommercial and unambitious."

That legacy can be seen in the more than 300 shows and events held in Luckenbach each year, including musical acts playing everything from honky-tonk to roots rock to alt country and blues. There also are any number of events Crouch either started or inspired, such as the Mud Dauber Chili Cook-Off and the Dast Ist Alles ("That's All") Fest. And the pickers' circles, where string players of varying talents sit around and play for each other, still happen regularly.

It's still possible for everybody to be somebody in Luckenbach.

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