

A PUBLICATION OF VISIT THE WOODLANDS

# PATHWAYS

## NEW IN TOWN

Phat Eatery

## HOW IT BEGAN

Tourism in  
The Woodlands

## Q&A

With local artist  
Brenda Ray



Photo courtesy of Mauricio Ramirez





Visit The Woodlands Board of Directors and Officers (from left to right): President Nick Wolda, Cameron Klepac, Jennifer Gohagan, Vice Chairman Linda Nelson, Chairman Brad Bailey, Secretary/Treasurer Richard Franks, Kim Lowe, Jenny Taylor, Monique Sharp

# Welcome to Pathways

There's nothing like holidays in The Woodlands. Larger-than-life holiday trees, joyous community events and incredible feasts from our local restaurants. Both residents and visitors know this is the place to be for the holiday season. If you've experienced the all-out festivities before, you're most likely nodding your head in agreement. This is a picturesque place where you can accomplish your holiday shopping, get in the spirit, and enjoy some R&R all at once.

It's this atmosphere that draws visitors to our destination during

the last two months of the year. Visit The Woodlands is excited to celebrate the holidays and continue supporting The Woodlands as we move into 2025 and beyond.

Please feel free to use our website and social media channels to excite your guests about this incredible place. And remember we can help get your business meetings and association meetings to The Woodlands. We're here to help!

Learn more about Visit The Woodlands at: [visitthewoodlands.com/about](http://visitthewoodlands.com/about).

## VISIT THE WOODLANDS STAFF MEMBERS

Nick Wolda, President  
 Elizabeth Eddins, Executive Director  
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 Ashley Fenner, Senior Sales Specialist

Ryan Greenwood, Senior Sales Specialist  
 Amber George, Social Media Coordinator  
 Andrea Day, Creative Media Coordinator  
 Julie Quinn, Servicing Specialist  
 Carla Montelongo, Administrative Analyst

# Why The Woodlands

## Thomas Markle Jewelers

"In 2009 Thomas Markle Jewelers expanded into The Woodlands. And it didn't take long to feel right at home serving a vibrant community that shared our values. Today, we are proud to be a trusted provider of fine jewelry, engagement rings, and luxury timepieces for The Woodlands residents."

**Thomas Markle**  
 Owner and Founder



Thomas Markle & Team | Located in Market Street



Linh Pham | Located off Woodlands Pkwy & 2978

## The JuicePop & More

Opening JuicePop in 2022 was all about bringing a next-level concept that goes beyond just juice. We combine fresh, cold-pressed juices with healthy food options, including gluten-free and vegan choices, designed to fuel an active lifestyle. My goal was to create a space where the community can experience wellness in a whole new way, with vibrant, wholesome meals and drinks that elevate everyday living.

**Linh Pham**  
 Owner



# How it Began

## Tourism in The Woodlands

2801 Technology Forest Blvd.,  
The Woodlands, TX 77381

Tourism has always been a key part of The Woodlands' vision, driving the economic vibrancy of this master-planned community since it was first founded by George P. Mitchell in 1974. Today, nearly 60 percent of The Woodlands Township's budget comes from sales, hotel, and mixed-use beverage taxes, giving residents and businesses one of the lowest tax rates in the country.

A major landmark in The Woodlands' tourism story is The Woodlands Resort, which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year. What began

as a 218-room hotel has grown into an award-winning resort with 400 guest rooms, five dining options, two championship golf courses, and a popular waterpark, featuring a Lazy River that stretches over 1,000 feet.

Other milestones along The Woodlands' tourism journey include the development of The Woodlands Town Center and The Woodlands Mall in 1994 and The Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion in 1990. The Pavilion, now the world's top-ranked outdoor amphitheater, started with a 10,000-seat capacity, hosting concerts by the Houston Symphony, Frank Sinatra, and Alabama. Today, it accommodates 16,500 people for 75 shows a year.

In 1999, the creation of The Woodlands Waterway added a distinctive feature



Waterway Square

### 20 MILLION

number of annual visitors  
to The Woodlands



Aerial of The Woodlands

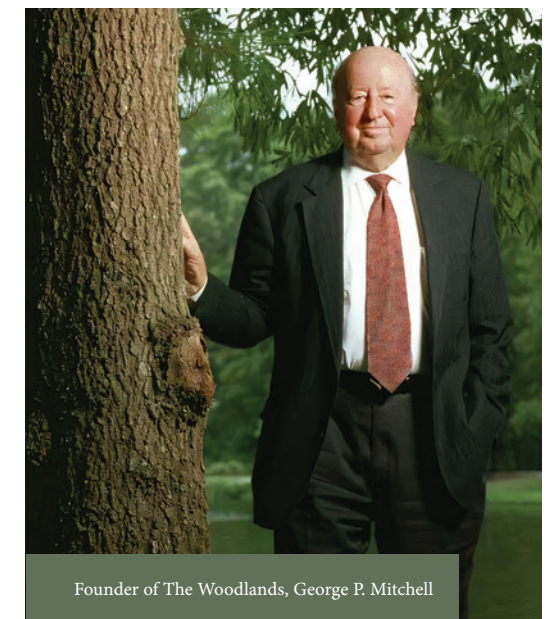
to the area, making it a hub for activity and home to two top-tier hotels: The Woodlands Waterway Marriott Hotel & Convention Center and The Westin at The Woodlands. These hotels have been instrumental in establishing The Woodlands as a prime location for business meetings and conventions.

The Woodlands Convention and Visitors Bureau, now known as Visit The Woodlands, was established in 2006 to promote the area as a premier destination for business and leisure travel. In 2016, the organization began driving a significant increase in hotel occupancy and tax collection by shifting its focus to tourism sales and marketing.

Today, The Woodlands welcomes more than 20 million visitors annually, with over 2,000 professional meetings and events contributing to its thriving hospitality sector. The Township has seen impressive growth, with hotel tax revenue increasing from \$6.5 million in 2013 to \$9.6 million in 2023.

All said, sales, hotel and mixed use beverage taxes make up nearly 60 percent of The Woodlands Township's budget, helping keep property taxes low for residents and businesses.

To learn more about The Woodlands and plan your visit, explore our website at [www.visitthewoodlands.com](http://www.visitthewoodlands.com).



Founder of The Woodlands, George P. Mitchell





# New in Town

## Phat Eatery

2290 Buckthorne Place,  
The Woodlands, Texas, 77380

Alex Au-Yeung, owner of Phat Eatery in Katy, was a talented chef with bold ambitions for the future. With the knowledge that he was a semi-finalist in the coveted James Beard Awards, he sadly lost his battle with cancer in March 2024.

Following his passing, it was up to his two friends and collaborators to make his dreams of a second restaurant a reality. In their great friend's memory, Kevin Lee and Marvin He took on the roles as Directors of Operations with a deep determination to make Alex's visions of a restaurant in The Woodlands come to life.

The first Phat Eatery opened in Katy in 2018, offering Malaysian

flavors and South Asian street food to the north Houston community. Six years after opening their first location, the second location in The Woodlands opened in late June at the Grogan's Mill Village Center.

"Over the years, we progressively saw an upwards count of people coming in from The Woodlands area," Lee shared with Visit The Woodlands. "Once we found the location at Grogan's Mill, we knew it was exactly what we wished for."

Almost triple the size, the second spot is an ambitious renovation of a 40-year-old building. It can seat almost 200 guests and it has an open-concept kitchen inspired by restaurants in Hong Kong. After overcoming several trials and tribulations, including a 35-foot tree falling onto the roof, the project slowly started to take shape for Kevin and Marvin. "Once we finally opened in The Woodlands, we had people crowding the doors and waiting to support us. People were excited to try a different kind of cuisine," said Lee.

With Malaysian-inspired décor, bright colors, and tall ceilings allowing for abundant natural light, the restaurant creates a unique and relaxing dining experience. The first thing you might notice is a neon sign, designed by the trio, defining the meaning of Phat as "highly attractive and gratifying."



Kevin Lee and Marvin He

“

*"We had people crowding the doors and waiting to support us. People were excited to try a different kind of cuisine."*

— Kevin Lee,  
Director of Operations

dishes that Alex was passionate about perfecting. Keep an eye out for the Cantonese-style barbecue and the Peking duck. There's also a cocktail menu featuring classic drinks with a Southeast Asian twist.

When asked what Au-Yeung would say about how everything turned out, Lee answered, "I think he would be relieved and very proud of us and how far we've come." Marvin He added: "If Alex were still with us, he'd say, 'Finally. We got it open. Dreams really do come true.'"

There are some new dishes coming soon to The Woodlands' location, too.

Inspired by his culinary training in Hong Kong, you will notice several

Roti Canai (center) | Kerabu Prawns (top) | Satay Skewers (bottom)

### MUST-TRY DISHES

#### Flaky Roti Canai

Indian flatbread with a curry dip

#### Satay Skewers

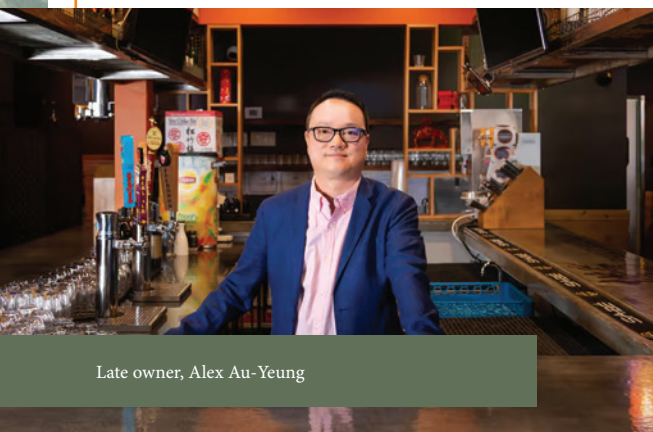
Charcoal grilled chicken skewers with a peanut satay sauce

#### Kerabu Prawns

Jumbo prawns with pickled green papaya, peanuts and toasted black sesame, and a Nyonya tangy light spicy sauce

#### Lychee Margarita

Lychee and Thai basil with Espolòn tequila, Grand Marnier and lime



Late owner, Alex Au-Yeung

Photos courtesy of Phat Eatery



# Q&A

## with Brenda Ray

### Local Artist

For Brenda Ray, The Woodlands provides a perfect canvas for inspiring creative ideas.

Originally from Minnesota, Brenda lives here with her husband, Chip. As an artist, she has explored several mediums and techniques throughout her career. Her recent work is inspired by music, featuring detailed concepts from rock and pop songs.

Brenda's latest piece entitled "I Love This Town" was commissioned by Howard Hughes as part of the 50th anniversary celebrations of The Woodlands.



I Love This Town, Brenda Ray

scene. I get a lot of my ideas when we go on road trips, listening to the radio on long journeys. It started out with songs by The Beatles. My husband is a big fan. They have such interesting titles, like I am The Walrus, which inspired another piece of mine. I've also created artwork from pop hits, such as Snow Patrol's Chasing Cars and Poker Face by Lady Gaga.

**Q. What's the story behind your special piece I Love This Town for The Woodlands' 50th anniversary celebrations?**

**A.** The scene shows the 'front of The Woodlands' from South Shore Park by the sea serpent to Waterway Square, with The Woodlands Waterway flowing through the whole piece. It features all the iconic elements of the Town Center, including Town Green Park, The Pavilion, and the theater on Market Street. The title is inspired by the song I Love This Town by Bon Jovi. As the lyrics go, "I always knew that I'd like this place. You don't have to look too far to find a friendly

face." I wanted to include a friendly policeman waving to the locals. It took time to fit in all the different elements and make it all work together.

**Q. What are your plans for your artwork in the future?**

**A.** I would love to create a space where people can guess the name of the song based on looking at the artwork. My husband and I are still figuring it all out, but we think it could be a fun date night idea! Discover more of Brenda's artwork at [www.BrendaRay.net](http://www.BrendaRay.net).

**Q. When did you start your journey as an artist?**

**A.** I've always loved painting. I started out studying colored pencils in college at The College of St. Benedict in Minnesota. After many years off raising my family, I got back into painting in the eighties working mostly with mixed media and acrylics. I also do oil paintings and portraits.

**Q. How long have you lived in The Woodlands?**

**A.** We moved to The Woodlands in 2003. It's a beautiful place to live and it's been wonderful to see all the changes that have taken place over the years. We split our time between Minnesota and Texas.

**Q. How do you find inspiration for your work?**

**A.** Music, song titles or lyrics have inspired my latest work. The Woodlands has a fantastic music





# Storytellers & Matchmakers

## Holiday Magic in The Woodlands

Every year, we watch The Woodlands transform into a winter wonderland during the holiday season. With twinkling lights, festive events, and a warm sense of community spirit, visitors from far and wide come to The Woodlands to enjoy some festive cheer.

The 2024 season is gearing up to be extra special. “The Woodlands really comes alive during the holiday season with all kinds of different activities and visual aspects, particularly in the Town Center,” said Nick Wolda, President of Visit The Woodlands.

### What makes the holiday season so unique?

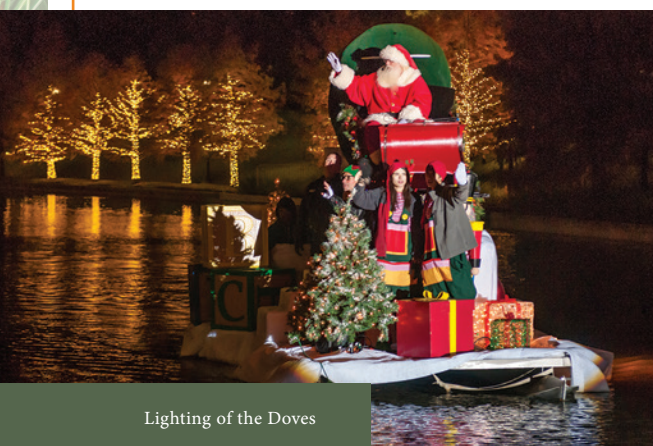
In The Woodlands, the most magical time of the year kicks off with the Lighting of The Doves. Celebrating its 42nd year, this beloved tradition



Photos with Santa

begins with a grand celebration at Town Green Park. The event symbolizes holiday peace and love, with glowing doves soaring above as Santa glides down The Woodlands Waterway on a sleigh boat, followed by a brilliant fireworks show.

With average daytime high temperatures reaching 73 degrees in November and 65 degrees in December, it’s also an ideal time to enjoy the great outdoors. As the days shorten, you can experience atmospheric winter evenings. New for 2024, visitors and residents alike can enjoy glittering festive lights along The Woodlands Waterway.



Lighting of the Doves

Visit The Woodlands recommends a visit during this special time of year. “We refer to it as our ‘Downtown in the Forest’ because of the beautiful trees that line The Woodlands Waterway, all wrapped in white lights,” Wolda said. “It creates a spectacular backdrop for everyone who visits.”

### Escape to ‘The Downtown in the Forest’

The Woodlands is the perfect location for a winter getaway. For many Texans, it is within short driving distance and there are 14 incredible



*“We refer to The Woodlands Town Center sometimes as our ‘Downtown in the Forest’ because of vibrancy of shopping, dining, hospitality and entertainment in the beautifully-forested Township.”*

— Nick Wolda  
(President, Visit The Woodlands)

hotels to choose from. One of the goals at Visit The Woodlands during the festive period is to encourage visitors to book an overnight stay. Visit The Woodlands’ activity is funded by hotel occupancy taxes, so when visitors book stays at local hotels, they play a key role in the community’s economy. For visitors, Sunday night visits offer a fantastic experience, with less crowds and generally lower hotel rates available. Stay in touch with our website for plenty more holiday activities: [www.visitthewoodlands.com](http://www.visitthewoodlands.com)



The Woodlands Ice Rink

### 5 Holiday Suggestions from the Visit The Woodlands Team

- Take the family to the Ice Rink at The Pavilion, which is open from mid-November to mid-January.
- Kayak along The Waterway to admire the holiday lights and colorful fall foliage.
- Explore the outdoors with over 220 miles of tree-lined pathways throughout The Woodlands and several hiking trails through George Mitchell Nature Preserve.
- Enjoy Market Street’s shopping and restaurants, and don’t miss the 70-foot-tall Christmas tree’s musical light show.
- Browse for the perfect holiday gifts and meet Santa at The Woodlands Mall.



# VISIT The Woodlands

The Woodlands Convention and Visitors Bureau  
2801 Technology Forest Blvd.  
The Woodlands, TX 77381



THEN  
1982

NOW  
2024

*Photo courtesy of The Woodlands Township*

*Photo courtesy of Derrick Bryant*

**Lighting of the Doves** has been a tradition in The Woodlands since 1982, signifying peace and the start of the holiday season. It first started at the Village of Grogan's Mill and has since moved to Town Green Park, where visitors can enjoy live music, vendors and Santa Claus arriving by boat on The Woodlands Waterway.



## DON'T MISS

**Market Street Tree Lighting** (November 21)  
**Lighting of the Doves** (November 23)



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Pathways is a publication of The Woodlands Convention and Visitors Bureau (dba: Visit The Woodlands), the official destination management organization responsible for promoting The Woodlands to drive demand for both hotel and retail tax collections. Visit The Woodlands is a 501(c)(6) organization that serves as a reliable and credible source for The Woodlands tourism industry. Its mission is to establish The Woodlands, Texas, as a beautiful, lively, and welcoming destination recognized regionally, nationally, and internationally for first-class business, convention, and leisure travel.