

A PUBLICATION OF VISIT THE WOODLANDS

PATHWAYS



NEW IN TOWN

TINA Stephens

Q&A

With
Executive Chef
Michael Batke

HOW IT BEGAN

The Red, Hot &
Blue Festival

SUMMER 2025 | Vol 4 - Issue 2

VISIT The
Woodlands



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

Welcome to Pathways

Break out your sunscreen and lemonade for a summer to remember! From scenic outdoor dining and live music to exhilarating, light-up-the-sky festivals, The Woodlands offers countless ways to enjoy the season under the sun.

Kick off your summer bucket list with a fist-pumping performance at The Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion, then celebrate this Independence Day at the annual Red, Hot & Blue Festival, featuring family-friendly activities and firework extravaganzas all over town. Nick Wolda, President of Visit The Woodlands, and Chris Nunes, The Woodlands Township's Chief Operating Officer, provide insight

into the evolution of this spectacular event. But the fun doesn't stop there! Enter the foodies' paradise known as Wine Walk — soon to make its first appearance at The Woodlands Resort — and stick around to discover what persuaded world-renowned chef, Michael Batke, to plant roots in The Woodlands.

Whether you're eager to soak up some sun or beat the heat this summer, there's a unique shopping, dining, or entertainment option for everyone in The Woodlands.

Learn more about Visit The Woodlands at: visitthewoodlands.com/about.

VISIT THE WOODLANDS STAFF MEMBERS

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Why The Woodlands

Doc Events

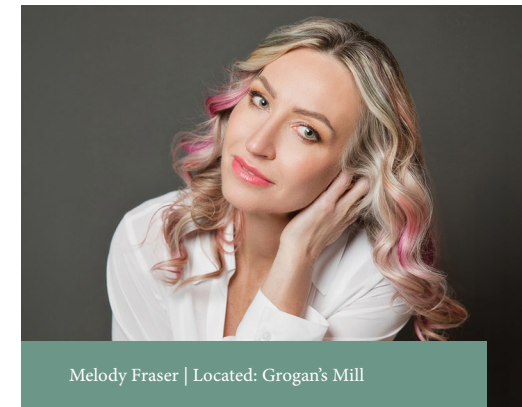
"I have held events in The Woodlands for 20 years. It has all the amenities of a big city and an intimate sense of community. But what keeps me coming back is Visit The Woodlands's commitment to open communication and finding solutions to any challenge."

Vanezza Garza

Senior Global Conference and Event Manager



Vanezza Garza | Doc Events



Melody Fraser | Located: Grogan's Mill

Blissful Waters Float Center

"I used to float regularly in Houston and Austin. Houston has the variety and Austin has the soul, but The Woodlands is the best of both worlds. It has that grounded, nature-connected energy that I want to bring to my clients, so it just feels like home."

Melody Fraser

Owner and Float Coach

The Woodlands Children's Museum

"Over the last 20 years, the museum has given generations of families a safe, playful environment for kids to begin their cultural journeys. This is what makes The Woodlands one of the most sought-after communities to call home."

Angela Colton

Executive Director



Angela Colton | Located: Panther Creek

How it Began

The Red, Hot & Blue Festival

Today, The Red, Hot & Blue Festival is known as one of the best celebrations of America's independence in the region, but it comes from surprisingly humble beginnings.

While The Woodlands has always celebrated Independence Day with a fireworks show, it wasn't until 1997, when the Town Center was beginning to emerge as an economic engine for the community, that the Town Center Improvement District first hosted The Red, Hot & Blue Festival, establishing a tradition in the heart of a deeply patriotic community.

The first annual The Red, Hot & Blue Festival took place where Kirby Ice House is located today. Intended to create a laid-back, small-town atmosphere, the event featured dunk tanks, a local band,

and a classic fireworks show. The more The Woodlands expanded, the popular the festival became. It frequently changed locations to accommodate the growing crowds. In 2000, the festival was moved to the south side of The Woodlands Mall (known as the rolling green before it changed into The Woodlands Waterway) and then moved to Town Green Park when it opened in 2004 and expanded to Waterway Square in 2008.

"Something that stands out about The Red, Hot & Blue Festival is how it has evolved and the positive impact on the community," said Nick Wolda, President of Visit The Woodlands. "And it's drawn all kinds of entertainers. In fact, 2013 featured a local resident named Parker McCollum."



The Red, Hot & Blue Festival circa 2000



The Red, Hot & Blue Festival circa 2014

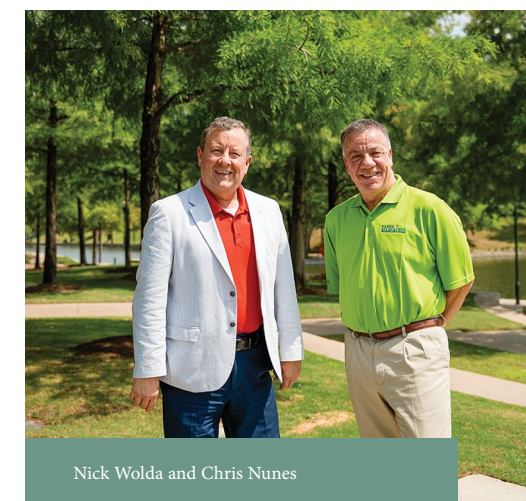
A strategic transfer of the festival from The Woodlands Convention & Visitors Bureau to The Woodlands Township's Parks and Recreation Department took place in 2016, taking The Red, Hot & Blue to new heights. Listening closely to the community's needs, Parks & Recreation created a (mostly) walkable hub of activities with new locations at Northshore Park, Hughes Landing, and Rob Flemming Park.

"There's a really great synergy between all these activation sites," said Chris Nunes, Chief Operating Officer, The Woodlands Township, "But there's also this neat 'pick your experience' aspect for guests to enjoy what they want to enjoy, whether they want to picnic in the park or try all the shopping and dining options along The Waterway."

Independence Day in The Woodlands is designed to bring the community together — and The Red, Hot & Blue Festival is only part of a larger whole. Every July 3, The Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion presents the Star-Spangled Salute, a free

patriotic performance by The Houston Symphony. Wake up early for The South County Fourth of July Parade, then take a dip at one of many Red, Hot & Pool locations before the Red, Hot & Blue fireworks extravaganza. Whichever experience guests prefer; everyone can find a way to celebrate and connect this summer.

For more information, see www.visitthewoodlands.com or www.thewoodlandstownship-tx.gov.



Nick Wolda and Chris Nunes

New in Town

TINA Stephens

1950 Hughes Landing Boulevard
The Woodlands, TX 77380

Searching for stylish, travel-friendly fashion? Discover the TINA Stephens boutique in Hughes Landing! Whether you prefer the effortless everyday wear of TEES by TINA or the sophisticated style of TINA's Made in Italy Collection, each high-quality piece is designed for comfort, convenience, and sustainability.



The Capital Grille

1155 Lake Woodlands Drive
The Woodlands, TX 77380

Known for its dry-aged steaks and fresh-caught seafood, The Capital Grille delivers impeccable service in a sophisticated atmosphere. Pair a masterfully prepared dish with one of 350 carefully curated wines or try a classic cocktail with a distinctive twist. Whether you're planning a business dinner or celebrating a special occasion, this modern American steakhouse serves to please and refine any palate.



Bowtique

1950 Hughes Landing Boulevard
The Woodlands, TX 77380

Explore Bowtique for luxury women's clothing, shoes, and accessories by designers across the globe. Featured brands include Milly, DVF, Shoshanna, Oblique Creation, and Hammit, so each piece is of premium quality and carefully curated to suit your style. From chic summer tops to classy leather handbags, you'll find a statement piece for any occasion!



Yard House

1105 Lake Woodlands Drive
The Woodlands, TX 77380

Yard House is your one-stop shop for any game day. They boast the world's largest selection of draft beers with over 100 options on tap, and their menu is equally extensive. From nachos and wings to burgers and pizza, the possibilities are endless. Even those with dietary restrictions can dine worry-free by checking the Yard House allergen menu online.

Kokoro Handroll Bar

24 Waterway Avenue, Unit 110
The Woodlands, TX 77380

With lights dimmed and seats tucked along the sushi bar, Kokoro offers guests an intimate atmosphere perfect for date nights or small gatherings. The staff is friendly and attentive, the menu simple and elegant. From spicy tuna handrolls to kampachi crudo, each dish is handcrafted with only the freshest ingredients for an exquisite fine dining experience.



La Rambla Bistro and Tapas Bar

26400 Kuykendahl Road, C160
The Woodlands, TX 77375

Savor the best of the Mediterranean at La Rambla! This Barcelona-inspired kitchen features the vibrant flavors of strawberry gazpacho, truffle cauliflower gratin, seared scallops, paella Valencia, and more. With a creative cocktail in hand, it isn't hard to unwind in this warm, social atmosphere.





with Michael Batke

Executive Chef of The Woodlands Waterway Marriott Hotel & Convention Center

Michael Batke has been a standout in the culinary world for over 30 years. After earning early acclaim with a Red Seal certification, he led kitchens in five-star hotels across North America, opened his own restaurant, and even cooked for royalty during the 2010 Winter Olympics. Since making The Woodlands home in 2022, he's elevated The Woodlands Waterway Marriott through custom dining experiences, sustainable kitchen practices, and mentorship. As Executive Chef, Batke brings world-class talent while embracing the warm, small-town spirit of the community.



Q. Who or what inspired you to become a chef?

A. My grandmothers. Grandma Gladys taught me how to prepare different German dishes, especially canned and pickled foods like sauerkraut. Grandma Verna was a master of Ukrainian cuisine, like perogies or varenyky. Her specialty was dark chocolate dumplings. She

would prepare them in a pressure cooker full of milk to create large bubbles inside the dumplings, so the texture was like a fluffy cake. Served with ice cream, there was never any left at the end of the day.

Q. Do you have a signature dish or a favorite type of cuisine to prepare?

A. I definitely lean toward more Asian-inspired dishes. When I worked at the St. Regis in San Francisco, I had

the opportunity to cook alongside Masaki Sasaki. Aside from being a master sashimi chef with two Michelin stars, he introduced me to white soy sauce, yuzu, Japanese sea grapes, kanzuri peppers, and much more. These ingredients brought a lot of flavor to the table, and they're so versatile. You can use them for almost any type of cuisine.

Q. What do you hope guests experience when they taste your food and why?

A. I want my guests to have an emotional connection with their meal. One of my more unique menu options is the watermelon pickle, which I make by peeling the green off the rind, cutting it into stalks, and pickling it. An older gentleman came in for breakfast once and asked to try them. Overcome with nostalgia, he said, "My mom used to make these for me. I haven't had one in over sixty years." That is the impact I want to have.

Q. How did you start your career in this industry?

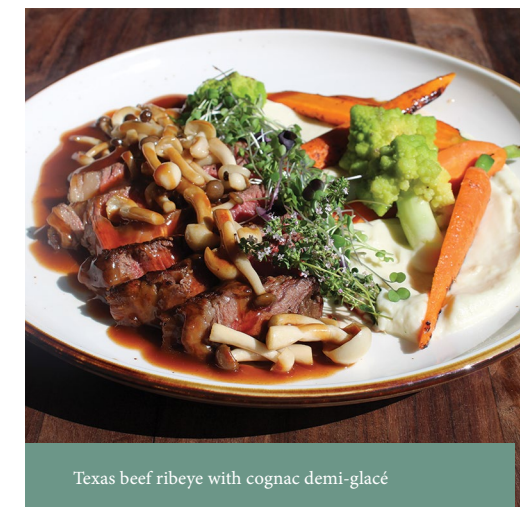
A. I began my culinary career with a two-year course at Selkirk College in British Columbia, Canada. After that, I completed a four-year apprenticeship at Chateau Lake, where I had the opportunity to work in every single kitchen: sauces, French pastries, fine dining, cold and hot kitchens, and fondue. From there, I went on to earn my Red Seal — a certification requiring nearly 8,000 hours of experience and a score of 80 percent or higher on a four-hour exam. This honor is recognized worldwide, so I was largely free to choose where I wanted to work from then on.

Q. What drew you to live and work in The Woodlands?

A. When I discovered Niche.com had ranked The Woodlands as the #1 Best City to Live in America. Visiting it myself only confirmed my decision. Despite its size, The Woodlands has a laid-back, small-town feel to it. Everybody stops to say, "Hi, how are you?" and will probably skip the handshake for a hug. That's really special, and I could see myself retiring here one day.

Q. Which of your projects has had the greatest impact on The Woodlands?

A. Last October, we introduced a program to recycle all our plastics, cardboard, and organic waste. This has already diverted more than 20,000 pounds of waste from landfills, turning it into soil instead. Ultimately, I'd like to use this soil to start our own garden and begin hosting chef's tables. The goal is to be hyper-local, self-sustainable, and good stewards of the great state of Texas.



Texas beef ribeye with cognac demi-glacé

On The Horizon

Mark your calendars with the ultimate summer bucket list



INSIDER TIPS

- 1 | Find free parking:** Many summer activities are within walking distance of the Yellow, Orange, Blue, and White Lots, and accessible parking is free in the Gold Lot.
- 2 | Spot a shortcut:** A new pedestrian bridge over The Woodlands Waterway cuts a more convenient path between parking and The Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion.
- 3 | Beat the heat:** With a Day Pass to The Woodlands Resort, you gain access to premiere waterpark perks, including a lazy river and poolside food-and-drink service.
- 4 | Float your boat:** Drop by the Riva Row or Lake's Edge Boat House for a relaxing swan boat, kayak, or paddleboard ride down The Waterway.
- 5 | Discover discounts:** Take a breather at a local restaurant or hotel with Special Offers found on the Visit The Woodlands website!
- 6 | Treat yourself:** Cool off while satisfying your sweet tooth at one of many frozen dessert shops around town, like Creamistry, OddFellows, or Sweet Frozen Bar!

SPOTIFY PLAYLIST

Check out our Pavilion Playlist on Spotify, including some of the best hits from 2025 artists. Scan the waveform to listen now!



2025 SUMMER EVENTS SCHEDULE

03/01 - 10/31	Splash Pads Open
05/03 - 10/26	Pavilion Summer Concert Season
06/05 - 08/07	Movie Nights on the Lawn at The Woodlands Mall
05/31 - 06/28	Waterway Nights Summer Concert Series
05/24 - 08/12	Community Pools Regular Season Opens
07/03	Star-Spangled Salute at The Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion Fourth
07/04	of July Parade at Market Street
07/04	The Red, Hot & Blue Festival
07/10 - 08/07	Rock the Row Concert Series
08/01 - 09/01	Houston Restaurant Weeks
09/01	Labor Day Celebration
09/26 - 09/28	Texas Fine Arts Craft Show at The Woodlands Waterway Marriott
10/04	Wine Walk
10/11	Memorial Hermann 10 for Texas



Houston Restaurant Weeks

"Dine Out & Do Good" this August in The Woodlands! Houston Restaurant Weeks is the largest annual fundraiser for **The Houston Food Bank**. Stop by all 12 of The Woodlands's participating restaurants for a select-menu, multi-course meal. Whether you dine-in or take-out, every dollar donated generates three meals for the cause.



Wine Walk

As the final event of Wine & Food Week, Wine Walk is one of the most highly anticipated events of the season. This can't-miss festival features live music, fine fare from local restaurants, and sommelier-driven tastings for more than 300 beverage choices. Quench your thirst and celebrate the creativity of local wine and food experts this October!



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

Just a *step outside*



Vonlane Launches Luxury Bus Service in The Woodlands

Vonlane officially launched its luxury motor coach service in The Woodlands on June 13, offering 38 weekly departures to Dallas. Passengers now enjoy first-class amenities like spacious leather seats, onboard attendants, Wi-Fi, and premium snacks — all departing from The Woodlands Waterway Marriott.



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VISITTHEWOODLANDS.COM



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.