

A PUBLICATION OF VISIT THE WOODLANDS

#SoWOODLANDS

THIS IS THE LIFE



WINTER 2023
VOL. 2, ISSUE 4

Neighbors and Friends...

With The Woodlands' 50th anniversary on the horizon, I want to acknowledge and applaud how our community has grown and stayed true to George Mitchell's vision. Mr. Mitchell was dedicated to developing a place where people could live, work, learn, and play in a preserved natural environment – and that's exactly what we're doing, almost 50 years later.

Long-time local traditions like this remind us that our community has been entrusted with something special. We recognize it, and we're committed to working together to care for it. As we enter into the next 50 years, we'll continue building new businesses and re-envisioning older attractions, all while maintaining the natural beauty of the forest and laying the groundwork for future generations to thrive in The Woodlands.



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Why The Woodlands?



"I decided to open up Sweets to the Sweet and Sweet Frozen Bar in the Woodlands because I wanted to share happiness through treats with the families in this community."

Jorge Oropesa
 Owner, Sweets to the Sweet & Sweet Frozen Bar

Photo Courtesy
 Sweets to the Sweet

"I chose The Woodlands because it embodies the perfect mix of qualities that effortlessly complemented my vision. Its serene natural beauty, strong sense of community, and the welcoming spirit of its residents all resonated with my life-long desire to own a small business."

Inspired by my experiences in diverse cities across the country and grounded in my southern roots, our collection showcases handpicked treasures, from antique pieces to carefully curated décor with a modern twist."



Heidi Smith
 Owner, Flamingo Rodeo Interiors

Photo Courtesy
 Flamingo Rodeo Interiors



"Lucchese's expansion of its retail arm has been an exciting priority this year, but what is more exciting is the opportunity to connect with existing brand fans and engage with new and curious ones in a market that feels like home."

The Woodlands community appreciates a curated, qualitative experience, and Lucchese looks forward to providing just that through connection, craftsmanship, and heritage."

Photo Courtesy
 Lucchese Bootmaker

Dough Kindy
 President, Lucchese Bootmaker



Articles in this issue have been condensed.
 Find the full articles and more online at visitthewoodlands.com/sowoodlands

The Refuge Steakhouse & Bourbon Bar

A Family Favorite in Creekside Park

By Annierose Donnelly

The Refuge Steakhouse and Bourbon Bar in Creekside is the culmination of a life-long ambition, a desire for quality, and a family passion project. Mark Zientek and his daughter, Autumn, are the folks behind its casual-elegant vibe.

This cozy Creekside bar and restaurant has a selection of over 250 whiskies, the largest selection of bourbon in north Houston. The restaurant also has a butchery room on-site, where quality meats are carefully prepared. Their signature dish is delicious, sizzling wood-fired steaks, which pair perfectly with the list of bourbons.

The Refuge Steakhouse & Bourbon Bar has a rustic ambiance that makes you feel right at home. Dark wood tones, live music and an open kitchen add to its welcoming feel. The restaurant opened in 2017, following the success of The Refuge Bar & Bistro, a craft cocktail bar on The Woodlands Waterway. The bistro was Mark's first venture, which he ran alongside Autumn, and it has recently sold.

Mark Zientek started his career with The Woodlands Development Company and Carlton Woods Country Club. With vast experience in The Woodlands hospitality industry, he remembers the early days of the restaurant industry. "When I started out, there were two restaurants in The Woodlands. At the time, we wondered if it could handle a third." said Mark.



Pictured from left to right: Autumn and Mark Zientek



The Refuge Steakhouse & Bourbon Bar
8540 Creekside Forest Dr #C800



FIRST TIME TO THE REFUGE? TRY THESE...

- The Butcher's Cut Wood-Fired Steaks
- Texas-inspired Spicy Chimichurri Sauce
- The Smokey Prairie - a Bourbon cocktail

Photos Courtesy The Refuge Steakhouse & Bourbon Bar



The Woodlands is full of very talented restaurateurs. We wanted to give people something different. A casual, everyday spot with a strong emphasis on great food and southern hospitality."



He watched the neighborhood grow over the years. He got to know the community's founder, George Mitchell, early on in his career in hospitality. "I used to serve George breakfast in the morning," Mark remembers.

Growing up in The Heights, Mark's dream of opening a restaurant started at a young age. He wanted to create a concept with a more laid-back atmosphere, something closer to his roots.

The Refuge Steakhouse & Bourbon Bar is the first of its kind in Creekside, a neighborhood known for family-friendly dining, not whiskey lounges. "The Woodlands has that small town vibe. It's so important for us in the hospitality industry because we come across so many different people. We watch families grow as they dine with us over the years."

Next door, the family's third restaurant will open this November. Mark's daughter Autumn will manage Southern Ice Co., a separate concept, alongside her husband. "We have a very reasonably priced menu in a friendly atmosphere," Autumn notes.

Southern Ice Co. will offer delicious comfort food, such as fried chicken and red beans and rice. It's the perfect spot to bring the kids after sports practice, or to meet friends and watch a game.

The Zientek family have created long-lasting favorite spots for The Woodlands. They are unafraid to bring new ideas to The Woodlands' dining scene.

Harrison's, Spruce Market & The Lobby Bar

What's New at The Woodlands Resort

By Mary Murphy

Last year, The Woodlands Resort was named one of the 10 best resorts in Texas by Travel + Leisure – and that was before its recent renovations. The property is a landmark in The Woodlands, well-known for its two championship golf courses, jaw-dropping Forest Oasis Waterpark (featuring a 1,000-foot lazy river), world-class tennis center, and premiere meeting spaces, guest rooms, and suites that overlook 350 acres of lush greenery.

Originally opened as “The Woodlands Inn” as part of a project by The Woodlands founder, George Mitchell, the resort has continued to evolve over the years. It became the first Curio Collection by Hilton branded resort in Texas in 2022 and has since enhanced its offerings with a \$26 million-dollar, property-wide renovation.

The new additions to The Woodlands Resort are sure to become fast favorites among visitors and locals alike. Staying at the resort enhances any visit, but you don't have to be a hotel guest to enjoy the new restaurants and boutique shop. **Harrison's** is open for breakfast or lunch with a view, featuring floor to ceiling windows that look out onto Lake Harrison (and a wrap-around patio). Choose from a variety of menu items or treat yourself to a breakfast buffet.

Spruce Market, another new addition, is also a scenic place to grab a cup of coffee or bite to eat. It's part boutique, part café, with floor-to-ceiling windows that look out on natural beauty. The café has coffee, pastries, flat breads, and sandwiches available to enjoy. Next door, **The Spruce Boutique** offers a curated selection of gifts and accessories from Texas makers – and on Fridays through Sundays from 4pm-6pm, Texans receive 15% off their purchase with a valid driver's license.

The Lobby Bar really shows how the renovation integrated nature into design. The art above the bar is reminiscent of falling leaves, and when the sun sets in the evening, the moving pieces catch the light and make it dance around the lobby. The bar showcases Texas wine, beers, and spirits, and is open to guests and locals during the afternoon. Better yet, there are several cozy fire pits outside for cooler weather.

“*The new additions to The Woodlands Resort are sure to become fast favorites among visitors and locals alike.*”

This holiday season is the perfect time to experience The Woodlands Resort's newest additions. Enjoy Breakfast with Santa at Harrison's (*Saturdays and Sundays from Dec. 2-17*), or bring the kids to decorate holiday cookies while you while you shop and sip complimentary wine during Sparkling Saturdays at Spruce Market (*Saturdays, Dec. 2-16*). From November 30th through Christmas Eve, Santa's Sleigh and a North Pole Mailbox will also be outside Harrison's for kiddos to pose for a photo and share Christmas wishes with Santa. In the mood for a getaway? Don't miss their New Year's Eve offers for discounts on a stay at The Resort, complete with dinner at Back Table and a NYE party.

Photos Courtesy The Woodlands Resort



Q&A

Photos Courtesy Jen Loves Paper



Jen Loves Paper
3759 FM 1488 Suite 450

Jen McDonald

Owner, Jen Loves Paper

By Annierose Donnelly

Earlier this year, Jen McDonald decided to follow her dreams and open a personalized party goods store in The Woodlands. An extension of her online offerings, the shop is an inviting place full of positivity, bright colors and original designs. Jen's eye for trends makes her boutique a go-to spot for event planning advice, gifts, and stationery.

Q: What's the story behind Jen Loves Paper?

A: My background is in education, but I've always loved the arts since I was little. I started doing graphic design and photography as a hobby, working mainly with children's birthday parties and small events and it grew into a business. Before I knew it, I was doing larger events, galas, and fundraisers. I have sold my designs for many years at the Junior League Holiday Market. I just love being the local party guru.

Q: Why did you decide to open a brick-and-mortar store?

A: It was always my dream to open a shop. I wanted to create an upscale party boutique where I could sell my line of party goods as well as offer a personalized experience for people in the community. Now, they come into the shop, we chat about their inspiration for their party, and we build a personal connection.

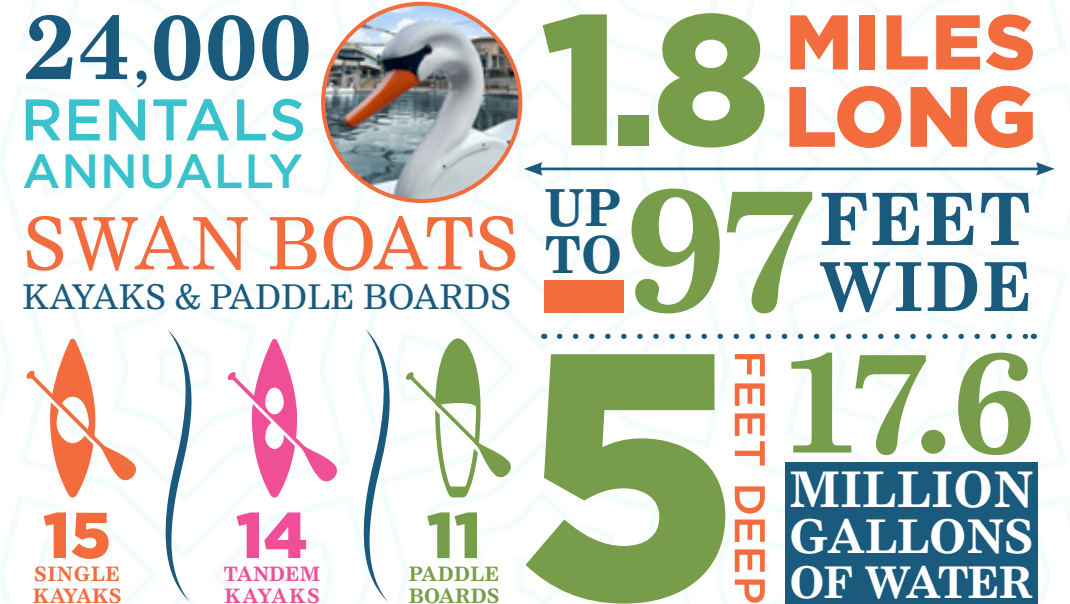
Q: Why do you love the most about owning a small business in The Woodlands?

A: The community has been so supportive over the years. Here in The Woodlands, people whisper my name and word travels fast. This is where we want to build our life as a family. We've got everything we need here.

THE IMPACT: The Woodlands Waterway



FIRST ENVISIONED IN 1972 - AS A SKETCH ON A PAPER NAPKIN! - CONSTRUCTION OF THE WOODLANDS WATERWAY FINALLY BEGAN IN 1999 AND WASN'T COMPLETED UNTIL 2018.



Source: Visit The Woodlands



Photo Courtesy Visit The Woodlands

This is The Life

I've always had a passion for driving transit because it allows me to serve others while getting to know residents and visitors in a community. This is one of the many reasons I love being a Town Center Trolley Driver. The trolleys are such a unique public transit system, and The Woodlands Township is an amazing place to work.

I've been driving as a career for over 20 years, and have previously worked for Houston Metro, Jackson Transit, and been a school bus driver. My profession brought me to The Woodlands, where I've enjoyed being a Town Center Trolley driver for a year and a half now. On any given day, during my shift, the ridership can range from 25 passengers to over 200! We have passengers from all over the country and around the world, as well as from different parts of Texas and the Houston area.

It's always interesting to see how passengers experience The Woodlands. The area has a lot to offer. Sometimes visitors come with preconceived ideas of what The Woodlands is and what others have told them...and they're always delighted to find out that The Woodlands is even better than what they've heard and what they expected.

One of my favorite things to do in The Woodlands when I'm not working is to check out the things my passengers rave about. I've been to the movie theaters, different restaurants, and I love to visit Hughes Landing. When I am working, I really enjoy assisting passengers on the trolley. Recently, I had a customer who required ADA boarding (all trolleys are equipped for passengers who need a little extra help). She was very grateful and excited that we were able to accommodate her to help her get around town. Moments like these often become my favorite memories as a trolley driver.

My career here is very rewarding, and I thoroughly enjoy my coworkers, the passengers, and The Township. It's always evolving and improving, and I'm grateful to be a part of it. Come see me on the trolley sometime - I'd be happy to show you around.



Jesse Blackwell
Town Center Trolley Driver



THEN
CIRCA 2006

Whether you're a visitor yourself or have friends and family in town for the holidays, the Visit The Woodlands Visitor Kiosk at Market Street is a great resource for discovering new things to see and do around town. Here, you'll find maps, visitor guides, and more. The Visitor Kiosk is located in the North Commons breezeway (next to CRÚ Food & Wine Bar), across from Market Street's Central Park. *Open Monday - Saturday from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. & Sunday from 12 to 6 p.m.*



& NOW
CIRCA 2023

Photo Courtesy Visit The Woodlands

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TEXAS

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