

News

Llano's dark night skies

By Ken Kattner

On April 6, the Llano City Council adopted resolution 2015-04-06 recognizing the need for cost-effective and non-intrusive lighting to preserve the night skies around Llano.

The resolution focuses on promoting and encouraging outdoor lighting that follows modern guidelines and technologies for efficient, cost effective and non-intrusive lighting. The resolution also emphasizes making efforts to educate landowners and businesses how to reduce energy consumption, save money, reduce light trespass and preserve our starry night skies.

This is an important step in promoting better lighting and preserving the beauty of our dark skies allowing all of us the full benefit and use of our property.

A number of other Hill Country cities have also adopted resolutions and ordinances protecting their night skies. For example, in 2013, Fredericksburg adopted a dark sky resolution and last year adopted a city ordinance protecting their night skies and creating guidelines for better lighting. Mason has also adopted a dark sky resolution and is currently

working on a dark sky ordinance. Dripping Springs has been designated a "Dark Sky Community" by the International Dark Sky Association (IDA). The IDA is located in Tucson Arizona and promotes standards and education about better night time lighting.

There are a number of significant benefits to better night time lighting, including, cost savings from more efficient lighting, eliminating glare so we can see better at night and increase safety, shielding our lights so they don't shine into a neighbor's window (this also makes better neighbors), and promoting tourism and our economy from visitors who come to enjoy the beauty of our dark skies. An increasing percentage of the Texas population has never seen the Milky Way.

Better night time lighting doesn't mean the absence of light. Instead, better lighting simply means we put light where we need it instead of directing it up into the sky where it is wasted and does no one any good. This is easily accomplished with shielding so the light does not shine upward or glare into your eyes - the light is directed downward where it is needed.

An example is driving at night. When you pass a brightly lit gas station or car dealership with lights that are not pointed down and shielded, you are temporarily blinded and cannot see what is in front of you even after you pass the light source - your eyes are still trying to adapt back to a lower light level. In these moments, we might not see the deer or pedestrian in the road.

Better lighting is also more efficient which means it saves us money. In the last several years, there have been major advances in bulb technology toward light emitting diodes or LEDs. Light fixtures using LEDs are now more efficient using half the energy of a normal

incandescent bulb while providing the same light output. This saves significantly on the electricity bill.

Preserving our dark skies with better lighting also helps the local economy by promoting tourism. Llano County is on the "edge of night" which means everything to the east of Llano is inundated with so much night time lighting, you can no longer see very many stars, much less the Milky Way. Llano County is where the skies get darker and is the shortest distance for tourists to travel from the eastern half of Texas in order to see the beauty of the night time sky.

Enchanted Rock State Natural Area is one of the jewels of Llano County and a big draw for tourists. In February 2015, Enchanted Rock celebrated its recent designation as an International Dark Sky Park by the IDA. This is a significant award and took several years to accomplish. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has recently put a lot of effort into promoting stargazing at all of its state parks in order to attract tourism and raise public awareness about a dwindling natural resource - the beauty of our dark Texas skies.

Enchanted Rock is very special in this effort because it is only one of two Texas state parks that have received a Dark Sky Park designation from the IDA. Moreover, Enchanted Rock received a Gold tier designation, which means the skies at the park have the highest dark sky rating. Enchanted Rock is truly one of the jewels of Llano County.

Recent economic studies support the importance of Enchanted Rock to the tourism and business communities in Llano and Fredericksburg. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department commissioned a study from John L. Crompton, a Texas A&M University Distinguished Professor to assess the economic impact of

all 89 state parks on the counties in which they are located. Data and questionnaires were collected from park visitors to determine how many people visit Enchanted Rock over time and how much are they spending in the Llano and Gillespie counties during their visits.

The study determined that visitors at Enchanted Rock collectively spent \$6,214,771 in Llano and Gillespie counties during 2014. The study was careful to remove data resulting from local visitors which means this spending came from tourists traveling from outside the counties to visit Enchanted Rock. More than half of this amount was spent on hotels, lodging and restaurants.

Enchanted Rock is important to tourism in Llano and we must make sure we protect this unique natural resource. Preserving the beauty of the Llano starry nights will serve to protect and enhance the skies at Enchanted Rock, ensuring that visitors come back each year to enjoy the special splendor of the stars and universe above.

The Llano City Council should be commended for adopting their resolution and taking this important step in promoting better lighting and preserving the Llano starry nights.

References:

<http://tpwd.texas.gov/news-media/releases/?req=20141106>

http://tpwd.texas.gov/news-media/releases/media/2014-11-06_economic_contributions_to_tsp.pdf

Ken Kattner owns property in Llano country where he has built an observatory to take astrophotographs of deep sky objects. www.putmanmountainobservatory.com He can be reached at ken@putmanmountainobservatory.com

Chamber Corner

4-22-2015

What's next for Llano? The bluebonnets have peaked and are on a downward spiral. The 26th annual Llano Crawfish Open is now history.

Where do we go from here? May is still an exciting month for businesses in Llano with Mother's Day, Llano High School graduation and Memorial Day weekend in the mix.

For the Chamber of Commerce, our annual Taste of Llano is only a month away, featuring the amazing restaurants in town as well as the cuisine from many of our bed and breakfast establishments.

Now is the time to come up with unique ideas to draw folks into your store or restaurant, such as a unique special of the day, a moonlight sale, set up a booth at the upcoming senior pro rodeo the weekend of May 2-3.

Let your imagination run wild. Whatever it takes to promote your business, promote it. Volunteer at an event and wear a shirt with your name or logo; let people see you, be a walking billboard for your business. A simple, free way to get noticed is to create a Facebook page. When someone checks into your business, give them a discount on any one item. Another free way to advertise is to be in the 80th Llano Open Pro Rodeo Parade on June 6. It doesn't cost a thing to get more than half of Llano to see your business. We want our businesses to be successful. Together, we can make Llano the Best...Briley.

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