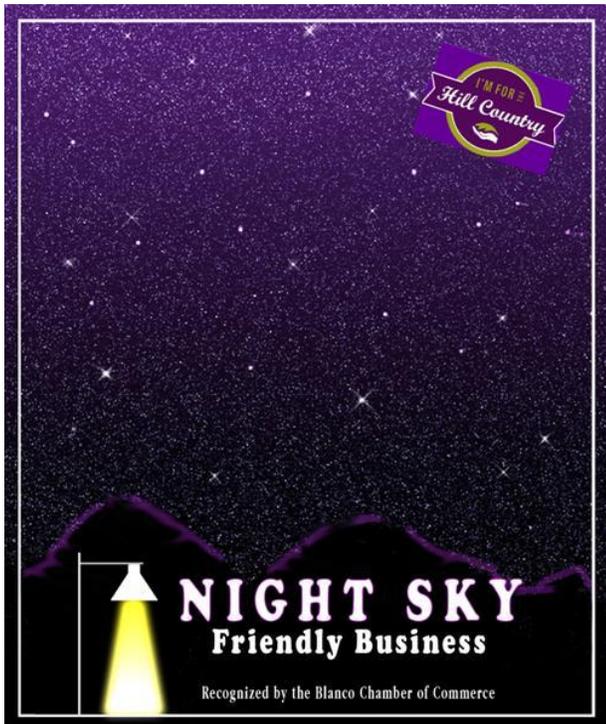


BLANCO CHAMBER INITIATES NIGHT SKY-FRIENDLY BUSINESS RECOGNITION PROGRAM

The Blanco Chamber of Commerce, in cooperation with the Hill Country Alliance, this week announced the implementation of a Night Sky-Friendly Business Recognition Program. The voluntary program gives public acknowledgement to Blanco area businesses that have outdoor lighting that neither shines up into Blanco's nighttime skies to create light pollution nor causes excessive glare that prevents others from enjoying the starry nights.



Look for these posters around town, the mark of a Night Sky-Friendly business as recognized by the Blanco Chamber of Commerce.

miles of Blanco,” Westcott explained, “are more than 4 million people who live in light polluted urban and suburban areas and for whom an unfettered view of a pristine nighttime sky is an impossibility. For many of these people, an overnight trip to Blanco to see the stars would be a treat. ‘Heads in beds’ mean more business for our motels, B&Bs, restaurants, service stations, and other commercial entities as well as for our state park. Protecting Blanco’s nighttime sky from light pollution ensures this valuable resource will endure.”

Chamber Board Member Jennifer Oines stated “Many Blanco businesses already have night sky friendly outdoor lighting that promotes preservation of Blanco’s nighttime skies. So, we thought it would be appropriate to recognize those businesses and to provide an incentive for other businesses to convert their outdoor lighting to night sky-friendly lighting. What our Stripes service station has just done to convert their outdoor lighting to be night sky-friendly is exactly what we’d like to see done throughout our business community.”

Chamber President Marcy Westcott stated, “We at the Chamber are enthused about this program and believe it will not only encourage our businesses to practice sound outdoor lighting management but will bring recognition to the Blanco Chamber of Commerce as being a nationwide leader in night sky preservation. There is no other such Chamber-sponsored program in the country, at least that we’re aware of.”

The Chamber’s program supports the work of numerous public meetings and workshops in Blanco that have determined that starry nighttime skies are a vital part of Blanco’s rural heritage and historic character and are worthy of preservation. Night sky preservation is also a part of Blanco’s Historic Preservation Action Plan, a plan overseen by the Blanco Historic Preservation Commission, an official entity of the Blanco City Government.

There is growing recognition in Blanco and throughout the rural Hill Country that sustainable night sky tourism has the potential to develop into a significant commercial draw that can benefit local retail businesses. “Within 60

Both Westcott and Oines stressed that the program is entirely voluntary. Any area business may participate whether they are members of the Chamber or not. Businesses may request the Chamber to conduct an outdoor lighting evaluation to determine qualification of their businesses for recognition as a Night Sky-Friendly Business.

Qualifying criteria will be in accordance with the requirements of the City of Blanco's Unified Development Code (UDC) that requires all outdoor lighting on business premises to be hooded, shielded, or aimed downward so that no light trespasses beyond the business property boundary or above the horizontal plane. The UDC requirement, however, only applies to outdoor lighting installed after February 14, 2006. All other lighting in the city was "grandfathered" in the UDC. Additionally, there are no restrictions whatsoever on outdoor lighting outside the Blanco city limits. As a consequence, there are still a great many lights in and around Blanco that continue to pollute the night sky. The Chamber program, therefore, encourages business owners with grandfathered outdoor lighting to voluntarily shield their existing lighting or replace it with night sky-friendly lighting fixtures.

Members of the Blanco Chamber of Commerce who qualify as a Night Sky-Friendly Business will be presented with a Night Sky-Friendly Business Recognition window sticker for display on the business premises; receive a Blanco Chamber of Commerce Certificate of Merit; be recognized on the Chamber's website as having Night Sky-Friendly outdoor lighting; be authorized to display the Night Sky-Friendly Business Recognition logo in their advertising and promotional activities; have their business name included on a consolidated recognition display to be prominently maintained on public view in the offices of the Blanco Chamber of Commerce; and be registered as members of the Hill Country Alliance's Night Sky Co-op and have their business name included on the Co-op's website.

"We are excited about this program," Westcott concluded, "and are gratified by the active support of the Hill Country Alliance. Our program is the test case of sorts as the Hill Country Alliance wants to expand Blanco's initiative throughout the 17 counties of the Hill Country. "

For more information on the Blanco Chamber of Commerce Night Sky-Friendly Business program, contact the Chamber at 830-833-5101. For advice on where to purchase Night Sky-Friendly lighting fixtures with the International Dark Sky Association Seal of Approval, go to <http://www.darksky.org/outdoor-lighting>. For information on night sky preservation issues through the Texas Hill Country and to join the Hill Country Night Sky Co-op, see the Hill Country Alliance's website at <http://www.hillcountryalliance.org/HCA/HillCountryNightSkyCoop>.