

Belton, Salado submitting proposals for preservation

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BELTON --- Local sites of historic interest could gain national attention later this year.

Officials and historic preservationists in Belton and Salado are entering a proposal to the National Trust for Historic Preservation to be included as destinations for field sessions during the National Preservation Conference slated for Oct. 27-30 in Austin.

The trust supports preserving historic buildings and neighborhoods and advocates saving the country's historic places to revitalize neighborhoods. Its national conventions attract 2,000 to 3,000 delegates each year.

On March 5 a group from Bell County met in Austin with Lori Feinman, assistant director for conferences and training, along with her staff and several trust board members.

Attending were Fred Morris III, Belton's chief city planner and historic preservation officer; Jerri Gauntt, Belton's support services coordinator; Jim Bienski, secretary of the Salado Historical Society; Nancy Kelsey, a member of the National Trust who appeared representing the Robertson Plantation heirs; and Michael Kelsey, chair of Belton's Historic Preservation Board.

Gauntt said the group has until March 19 to submit a proposal to Feinmann for a field trip for delegates to travel by chartered bus to visit Robertson Plantation in Salado and then visit Belton's historic district.

Feinmann told a gathering that included cities from all around Central Texas that this was the time to showcase their significant historic sites,

buildings and landscapes and demonstrate strategies for saving buildings and local history.

She said her organization is looking for the area's 11 most important places to show off to conference attendees. Gauntt said a lot of work lies ahead in the next few days to meet the deadline.

'We will submit a proposal showing how even small towns like Belton and Salado can preserve their important cultural and historic heritage,' she said. 'Both communities have accomplished preservation goals by developing partnerships with other organizations and individuals.'

She said a prime example in Belton is the Harris Community Center, once Harris High School, which was restored by a joint effort of the city, the Belton school district and Belton Chamber of Commerce.

'Another is the restoration of the Belton South Cemetery which has been a joint effort by the city, the Sons of the Confederacy, the daughters organizations and individuals.'

Preserving Robertson Plantation has been a partnership of the heirs, the Salado Historical Society, the mayor and aldermen and many civic organizations.

Kelsey said a field session to Salado and Belton would put both communities on the map with national preservationists. She said it will give conference attendees a firsthand look at local preservation topics, projects and sites and teach lessons they can apply in their own communities.

Bienski said holding Robertson Plantation open for the attendees would open new vistas for them.

'In many ways the Robertson Plantation continues to be the best-kept historical secret in state of Texas and beyond,' Bienski said. 'This can be our coming out party beyond Central Texas because we will have preservationists and historians from all around the country here to focus on one of the real historical treasures in the whole state.'

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