

Many years ago, in his groundbreaking book *The Improbable Rise of Redneck Rock*, author Jan Reid recounted a chance encounter on the streets of Fredericksburg...

The late Gov. John Connally was a household name and face in Texas during much of his life, the most immediately recognizable Texan next to LBJ himself. One day at the height of his fame, Connally found himself in Fredericksburg where he happened to run into an old acquaintance. "You still raising sheep around Fredericksburg, Hondo?" Connally asked. "Yes I am, John," his quarry responded. "What are you doing these days?"

That was the late Hondo Crouch in a nutshell—irrepressible, a trifle irreverent and entirely undaunted by whatever life threw at him.

Hondo went on to achieve a certain nubbins of celebrity himself, and permanent enshrinement in the Texas Characters Hall of Fame when he purchased the town of Luckenbach, Texas in 1970. Thanks to a series of whimsical promotions, such as an all-women's chili cookoff, Hondo put the nearly-abandoned hamlet on the map (His business card read "Imagineer.").

The essence of Hondo's spirit endures—and is enshrined—at Hondo's, a restaurant and concert venue in Fredericksburg's newly-blooming west end of downtown (at 312 W. Main, to be exact). "We call it 'A family-friendly honky-tonk,'" says owner Cris Graham with a smile.

Hondo's is run by Hondo Crouch's daughter Cris. It's an intriguing place that combines Texas roadhouse dining (the head chef, John Phelps, is a dapper Louisiana native with a tenure at Dallas' famous The Mansion at Turtle Creek under his belt) and live music (Jerry Jeff Walker, Bob Schneider, Monte Montgomery and Jerry Jeff's son Django Walker are among the recent attractions) in a casual atmosphere. Country tradition, there's a fine shaded biergarten attached to the building.

Oh, yeah, the building...Part of Fredericksburg's enduring charm is embodied in its fine collection of frontier-era limestone buildings and German "fachwerk" (the Bavarian equivalent of gingerbread trim) on many of the buildings lining Main St.

Hondo's is housed in the former Krauskopf Building, built in 1900, which over its checkered history has housed a gunsmithing business, a saloon (one of 13 such establishments which lined Main St. prior to Prohibition) and, interestingly, a previous restaurant called Oma Kooock's, whose proprietor, Guich Kooock, was one of Hondo Crouch's early partners in Luckenbach.

Hondo's originally opened as "Hondo's On Main" in another location and moved to its present spot in June 2004. As it happened, the establishment opened its doors in time to help fuel a renaissance in and around Fredericksburg. A \$20-million dollar renovation by the Gillespie County Historical Society and the Pioneer Museum Complex of historical buildings, across the street from Hondo's, is fixing to break ground; other downtown venues, such as the Auslander Biergarten, are bringing in popular bands from Austin and around Texas; new wineries are opening up and exporting vintages all around the nearby Hill Country—there is a fresh sense of vibrancy and enthusiasm that seems to permeate the once-sleepy German community.

"There used to be a postcard with the caption 'Nightlife In Fredericksburg'—and it was all black," laughed VelAnne Howle, of www.hill-country-visitor.com, a tourist entity. "Now there's a whole new thing going on in Fredericksburg after dark. It's like a mini-version of Sixth Street in Austin, Fredericksburg's own entertainment district, with upscale dining, live entertainment, wine bars, galleries, and, shopping. The streets of Fredericksburg don't roll up at sunset anymore".

Hondo's helps embody that new infusion of energy while still holding on to the best of the past—a link to an older Texas that is vanishing rapidly in the 21st century. The curtain in front of the stage inside features painted replicas of old advertisements for blacksmiths, sausage makers and Pearl Lager Beer.

Paintings and photos and memorabilia of Hondo adorn the walls. The menu features a



HONDO'S

TEXAS MUSIC ★ TEXAS FUN ★ TEXAS FOOD

by: John T. Davis

lot of sophisticated touches, but its building blocks are steaks, Tex-Mex, chili and burgers—the kind of rib-sticking food that the German burghers and ranchers in the surrounding hills cut their teeth on. "We call it gourmet bar food," says Cris Graham. For daily menus and specials, as well as upcoming musical events, see www.hondosonmain.com.

One of the house specialties comes from the bar—a shot of Herradura tequila served neat in cored-out jalapeño pepper. It is, to say the least, memorable. An order of six of them is called a "Hondo's Six Shooter."

It's the kind of gimmick that Hondo Crouch would have enjoyed, which after all is sort of the point. Fredericksburg is a bigger, more diverse, more popular and arguably more sophisticated place than it was in Hondo's day, but Cris and her staff are determined to preserve his memory and, in a larger sense, the down home charm of the Texas Hill Country which he embodied. *JTD*

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