TEXAS HERITAGE MUSEUM
HOME OF THE OFFICIAL STATE MEDAL OF HONOR MEMORIAL TO NATIVE-BORN TEXANS

LASTING LEGACIES
NEWSLETTER

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Letter from the Director

Welcome to the Texas Heritage Museum's first digital newsletter!

This newsletter is intended to be an extension of our physical presence to further connect with our visitors, colleagues, researchers, students, and the communities we serve. We hope it will be a way to stay in touch and keep our followers updated on all the exciting things happening at the museum.

We want to celebrate Mary Ann Schneider and Rosa Santos, who both leave lasting legacies at the museum as they retire after many years of dedicated service and commitment to preserving history for the Hill College community, the State of Texas, and all the veterans who have served this country.

Rosa Santos served the museum faithfully from 2000 to 2025, contributing 25 years of steady support, institutional knowledge, and day-to-day reliability that helped anchor the museum through periods of growth, new and rotating exhibits, and expanding public programs.

Mary Ann Schneider joined the team in 2006 and served through 2025, bringing nearly two decades of professionalism, warmth, and a strong work ethic that enriched both visitor experiences and essential in-house operations of the museum.

Together, Mary Ann and Rosa represent more than 40 years of combined service, embodying the heart of the Texas Heritage Museum through their dedication, teamwork, and genuine care for colleagues, students, and the wide range of visitors we welcome each year. Their presence will be deeply missed, even as their contributions continue to shape the museum's success for years to come.

The museum is thrilled to welcome Ava Pettinger, who has accepted the position of receptionist and administrative assistant. Ava brings 10 years of experience to her role, having previously served as the executive assistant to the vice president of instruction at Hill College. Ava began full-time with the museum in January 2026 and has already shown her passion for creating an atmosphere of excellence and kindness to our visitors, students, and colleagues.

In her free time, Ava enjoys traveling, movies, music, and creating and firing raku pottery. Make sure to stop by the museum and introduce yourself to her next time you're on campus.

I would also like to say how excited we are to welcome our new assistant museum director, Priscilla Schubert! Priscilla comes to the museum from the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., where she served as the events coordinator and museum educator. She brings over nine years of experience in classroom and museum education to her position. We are excited to see what she will add to the team in leading the museum moving forward.

"I am excited to work alongside John and his amazing team and look forward to helping advance his vision for the future of the museum," said Schubert.

Lastly, I am pleased to announce that last month we were incredibly honored to receive the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) National Medal. It is such a privilege to represent academic museums in the state and across the country in this capacity. Through the support of the college, staff teamwork, and community support, we truly do make a difference in the lives of our students and the communities we serve.

—John Versluis, Executive Director & Chief Curator

Texas Heritage Museum wins prestigious National Medal Award from the Institute of Museum and Library Services

On February 17, 2026, The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) announced that the Texas Heritage Museum (THM) at Hill College was named one of five museums in the country to receive the IMLS National Medal, the highest honor for museums and libraries in the United States that make significant and exceptional contributions to their communities by supporting and promoting lifelong learning to individuals of all ages and backgrounds. The Texas Heritage Museum is the first community college in the United States, out of nearly 1,500 nationwide community colleges, to be recognized as an IMLS National Medal recipient and the first academic museum out of 226 in the State of Texas to receive this honor.

Each year, up to 10 institutions in the country are awarded the national medal—five museums and five libraries. Since 1994, IMLS has presented this award to outstanding libraries and museums of all types and sizes that deeply impact their communities.

The museum's nomination was submitted by longtime supporter of Hill College, Congressman Jake Ellzey, who is serving his third term as representative of the 6th Congressional District of Texas, in recognition of the museum's service and honor to veterans, students, historians, educators, and communities across Texas as well as visitors from all over the nation.

"When I nominated the museum for this award, I wasn't just thinking about artifacts behind glass. I was thinking about the heart of this place where education, history, and service all come together. A place where students learn surrounded by stories of courage, sacrifice, and resilience, the very stories that have shaped Texas and the United States," said Congressman Ellzey. "I couldn't be more proud to see this honor come to Hill County. Hill College has shown that greatness isn't about size; it's about purpose—the purpose to educate, to honor, and to carry the stories about Texas forward."

"Congressional support is an essential step in the IMLS selection process, and the community of Hill College and the Texas Heritage Museum is deeply grateful to Congressman Ellzey and his team for championing the museum's achievements and statewide impact," said Executive Director & Chief Curator of the Texas Heritage Museum John Versluis.

In the last 30 years, only 232 institutions—museums and libraries combined—have received the National Medal. The IMLS National Medal award is three times rarer than a Pulitzer Prize and twice as rare as a Nobel Prize when measured over the same period—making this recognition one of the most exclusive honors in the United States of educational and cultural institutions—placing THM among the most distinguished museum institutions in America.

This award recognizes libraries and museums nationwide who demonstrate a deep impact in the communities they serve. To be honored, institutions must show a dedication to fostering lifelong learning for all people of all ages by providing access to information through advancing digital availability when it comes to informational resources, e-books, and other online materials to further education. Institutions must also show a commitment to enriching the lives of members of the community by providing spaces for connection and conversation as well as preserving natural and cultural heritage.

"I am honored to have had the opportunity to award the National Medal for Museum and Library Service to these exceptional cultural institutions. They truly represent some of the best that the museum and library fields have to offer America and its citizens," said Acting Director of IMLS and Deputy Director of Labor Keith Sonderling.

Established in 1964, the museum serves as the cultural and historical cornerstone of the college. It provides opportunities for integrated college courses by allowing instructors to utilize the collection as a compliment to coursework; military and veteran engagement through exhibitions and the annual Medal of Honor Brick Ceremony; Texas history preservation and scholarship, research, archival development through exhibitions, and preserving history in the archives; K–12 and higher education programming; and community partnerships and statewide outreach.

The museum houses over 25,000 historical artifacts, and the Historical Research Center (HRC), a subdivision of the museum, houses over 15,000 publications and over 700 cubic feet of archive collections. In 2009, the Texas legislature established the THM as the site for the Official Texas State Medal of Honor Memorial to Native-born Texans. In the second edition of his book Genealogical Resources of the Civil War Era: Online and Published Military or Civilian Name Lists, 1861–1869 & Post-War Veteran Lists, published in 2017, historical scholar William Dollarhide named the HRC one of the top six most important Civil War resource centers in the nation.

"The Texas Heritage Museum embodies the values of excellence, education, and community engagement. Its contributions to the field of museum studies and its

impact on our students and community members are profound and far-reaching," said Hill College President Dr. Thomas Mills.

Under the direction of Executive Director & Chief Curator John Versluis, who joined the museum in 2005, the museum has grown in collections, outreach, and state and national standings. In addition to his role at the THM, Versluis also served as the president and CEO of the Association of Academic Museums & Galleries (AAMG), the leading educational and professional organization for academic museums in the United States, from 2017–2020 and the immediate past president from 2020–2023. In 2023, he was awarded the 10th annual North Texas Community College Consortium Jesse Jones Leadership award, the organization's highest honor.

In 2023, the Texas Heritage Museum received its accreditation from the American Alliance of Museum (AAM). Only 1,123 museums out of approximately 33,000 museums in the United States have AAM accreditation. Of the museums accredited, only four academic museums have received both the IMLS National Medal and AAM accreditation.

"At the Texas Heritage Museum, we believe that history becomes most powerful when it is lived, studied, and shared," said Versluis. "Every day, our museum supports Hill College courses, partners with veterans, inspires K–12 students, advances Texas historical research, and engages communities across the state. This IMLS National Medal affirms that our community-college museum stands among the nation's most distinguished institutions and demonstrates the vital role academic museums play in enriching education, preserving heritage, and serving the public good."

"I am honored and deeply grateful to stand alongside our faculty, staff, and students to congratulate the Texas Heritage Museum, its supporters, and its exemplary staff for being recognized with this extremely prestigious award," said Dr. Mills. "Winning the National Medal for Museum and Library Service speaks not just to the magnificent quality of our museum, but to the collective dedication of our people, preserving and sharing our rich wartime history while also exuding excellence. Special congratulations are due to John Versluis, executive director & chief curator of the museum, who is the tireless driving force behind what we all consider to be the crown jewel of Hill College."

The official National Medal ceremony will be held in Washington, D.C., on July 21, 2026 at the George Washington Masonic Temple, where representatives of the Texas Heritage Museum will join other national honorees in a formal recognition event hosted by the Institute of Museum and Library Services. In November, Hill College will also host a gala in honor of the award; more details to come.

Click here to watch the announcement video!

New exhibit highlights Hill College's history and contributions during World War II

This past October, the museum unveiled a new exhibit exploring the rich history of Hill College and its significant role during World War II. Consisting of two sections, the exhibit provides a comprehensive look at the institution's heritage and service.

The first section presents a concise history of Hill College, beginning with its founding in the 1920s and continuing through the present day, highlighting the college's academic growth, athletic achievements, and its evolving campus life.

The second section focuses on the college's participations in WWII, featuring photographs from the 1940s that document the institution's transformation into a flight training school during the war. These images offer visitors a compelling visual narrative of the college's contributions to the national war effort.

A new display will be added to the exhibit showcasing a lens preserved from a lighthouse in Galveston, Texas. This artifact not only represents the state's naval history but also symbolizes Hill College's commitment to serving as a beacon of excellence for its students and the communities it serves.

We welcome visitors to explore this exhibit and discover this important chapter in the history of Hill College and the Hillsboro community.

Texas Heritage Museum is proud to help with historic preservation and education by being a member of the following organizations:

AAMG
Association of Academic Museums & Galleries

American Alliance of Museums
Member

Texas Association of Museums

Texas Lakes Trail
Texas Historical Commission
Texas Heritage Trails Program

American Alliance of Museums
Accredited Museum

Texas Heritage Museum
Hill College

Hill College

Annual Membership Form

Please use a ballpoint pen.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: ____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Name on Card: _____

Card Type: _____

Card Number: _____

Expiration Date: ___/____ CCV: _____

Signature: _____

Please make check or money order payable to Texas Heritage Museum. For your convenience, we also accept VISA, MASTERCARD, DISCOVER & AMERICAN EXPRESS.

- ☐ Individual $25
- ☐ Family $35
- ☐ Business $50
- ☐ Patron $100
- ☐ Benefactor $250

Medal of Honor Memorial Brick Campaign

If you sign up for a membership with the Texas Heritage Museum today, you may also sponsor a brick at a discounted price of $75. Using the space below, tell us what you would like your brick to say. Please limit to 15 characters per line and three lines per brick. If you decide to purchase more than one brick, please attach additional information to this form.

Those wanting to buy a brick without a membership may do so at the regular price of $100.

Yes, I would like to sponsor a brick.

☐ Please add this amount to my membership.

_____

_____

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NOW OPEN FOR EXTENDED HOURS ON MONDAYS!
8 a.m. - 7 p.m.

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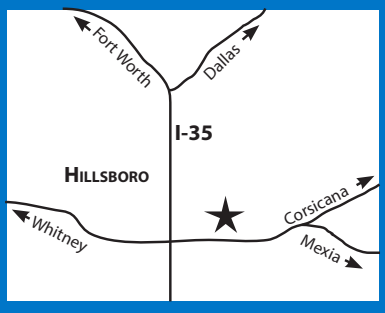
Hours

Gallery & Collections
Mon., 8 a.m. - 7 p.m.
Tues.– Thurs., 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Fri. - Sun., CLOSED

Historical Research Center
Historical Research Center will be available by appointment only by calling **Mary Ann Schneider at 254.659.7752.**



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