

April 15, 2009

LUFKIN ◊ On Sunday, April 19, Dr. F.E. Abernethy, Distinguished Regents Professor Emeritus of English at Stephen F. Austin State University, and Janice Bezanson, Executive Director of the Texas Conservation Alliance, will present "An Afternoon on the Neches" lecture at 2 p.m. at the Museum of East Texas. This lecture is open to the public and free of charge. Additionally, Richard Donovan will be on hand to sign copies of his book *Paddling Down the Neches* and Dr. Abernethy will be signing copies of *Tales of the Big Thicket*. Both books will be available for sale.

Abernethy's lecture will cover the history of the Neches River. The title of the talk is "The Flow of the Neches." He will talk about the origin and the route of the Neches through East Texas, the naming of it, the kinds of people who made their livings along its banks, its history and legends, and its spirit and importance to Deep East Texas.



Dr. F.E. Abernethy, Janice Bezanson and Richard Donovan are the invited guests for "An Afternoon on the Neches," to be held at 2 p.m. Sunday, April 19, at the Museum of East Texas in Lufkin.

Francis Edward Abernethy is Distinguished Regents Professor Emeritus of English at Stephen F. Austin State University, the Executive Secretary-Editor Emeritus of the Texas Folklore Society from 1971 to 2004, the Curator of Exhibits for the East Texas Historical Association, and a member of the Texas Institute of Letters. Dr. Abernethy attended Stephen F. Austin State University and Louisiana State University, where he received his doctorate in Renaissance Literature. He has taught at Woodville High School, Louisiana State University, Lamar State University, and Stephen F. Austin State University. He is the editor of *Tales From the Big Thicket*, *Built in Texas*, *Legendary Ladies of Texas*, *Folk Art in Texas*, *Texas Toys and Games*, *Juneteenth*

Texas, and fifteen other volumes for the Texas Folklore Society. He has published poetry, short stories, a folk music book entitled *Singin' Texas*, a book of legends entitled *Legends of Texas' Heroic Age*, and a history of the Texas Folklore Society in three volumes. He has lectured widely, both popularly and academically. He is a World War II veteran, he explored the caves of Mexico and the Yucatan for over twenty years, he is a world traveler and a scuba diver, he soloed in a Cessna, and he plays the bass fiddle in the East Texas String Ensemble of Nacogdoches. Abernethy was also named 2008 Citizen of the Year by the Nacogdoches County Chamber of Commerce, and has worked tirelessly since 1986 building the Lanana Creek Trail in Nacogdoches. He continues to work on the Trail, continually making improvements and creating parks along the Trail.

Bezanson's lecture will cover the subject of "The Neches Today." She explains that, "The Neches continues to thread its way through the life of East Texas. More than a million people live, work, and play in the Neches watershed. Many of them hunt or boat or fish along the river. Others work in timber mills fed by its bottomland forests. Some don't pay much attention to the river, not quite recognizing the irreplaceable economic benefits it provides." Her portion of the lecture will highlight the benefits and importance the Neches River continues to make on the lives of all who live near it. Bezanson will explain that the Neches is an integral part of the geography, history, culture, economy, and lives of the who live in the Neches Valley and of many who live outside its bounds.

Janice Bezanson's 25 years experience in conservation and coalition-building have given her countless opportunities to protect rivers, forests, and other special landscapes. Since starting as a volunteer in 1982, pressing for wilderness areas in Texas's national forests, she has successfully campaigned for creating and protecting wildlife refuges, improving forest management on public lands, and obtaining water supplies from existing reservoirs rather than building new dams that inundate ranches and forests. She advises citizens dealing with local environmental problems and connects them to the broader conservation picture.

Janice served on Texas Conservation Alliance's board of trustees and for two years was chairman of the organization before joining the staff. During ten years as Issues Coordinator, Janice lobbied forest issues in Congress, built grassroots coalitions to influence conservation policies, organized a national campaign to protect a wildlife refuge in Texas, and recruited volunteers to address numerous environmental problems.

In her ten years as executive director of Texas Conservation Alliance, Janice has supervised the organization's administrative functions, fundraising, and special projects, while continuing to work on natural resource issues. Janice has served on advisory boards for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Dallas Historic Tree Coalition and on the boards of American Lands Alliance, the State Environmental Leadership Program, Natural Area Preservation Association (now Texas Land Conservancy), the Conservation History Association of Texas, and others.



Dr. F.E. Abernathy and Richard Donovan will be on hand to sign copies of their respective books about the Neches River.

Among her many accolades, Janice was the recipient of the Chevron Conservation Award.

Richard Donovan was born in Jasper, Texas. He has been intimately acquainted with the Neches River region since his childhood and felt concern early in his life that all of Texas's wildlife was going the way of the black bears, eagles, alligators, etc. The

concerns he had nursed since his youth for wildlife habitat were stirred in the 1970s when vast acreages of clear-cuts began appearing like great cancerous growths on the land. These clear-cuts were destroying more wildlife in one month than all the small hardwood sawmills and illegal hunters could wipe out in a year.

Today, a large part of his time is devoted to Texas environmental issues. He is a member of the Texas Committee on Natural Resources (TCONR), serving as Chair of its Forest Task Force. Donovan focuses his efforts primarily on issues that affect the forests, wildlife habitat, and water resources of the state. He is active in several environmental organizations, including the National Wildlife Federation, East Texas Forest and Wildlife Coalition, and Pineywoods Sierra Group.

In the autumn of 1999, he launched the Neches River Canoe Expedition to call attention to the threats facing the river. He paddled a canoe some 235 miles down the river from Lake Palestine to Lake B. A. Steinhagan. The outdoor odyssey took 24 days and was the experience of a lifetime. He recorded many of the more interesting incidents in a small notebook dangling from a lanyard around his neck. These notes were later incorporated into the book, *Paddling the Wild Neches*, published in May 2006 by Texas A&M University Press. The book is now in its second printing.

The media coverage the first expedition received prompted him to stage the second Neches River Canoe Expedition in the autumn of 2001. This time he would expand the expedition another 85 miles to Collier's Ferry Park in Beaumont.

The Lone Star Chapter Sierra Club awarded him the Evelyn R. Edens Award and the National Wildlife Federation named him Conservation Hero for his efforts to protect the Neches and the 200 species of trees, 300 species of birds, 50 species of animals and countless species of fish, amphibians, and reptiles that live in the river and its bottomland hardwood habitat.

About the Museum

The Museum of East Texas is a non-profit organization whose primary mission is education through exhibitions of art and history. The Museum is located at 503 N. Second Street in Lufkin, Texas. For general information, to schedule a docent-guided tour, to become a Museum member (memberships start at \$25) or for facility rental information, call (936) 639-4434 or visit our website at www.metlufkin.org. Museum hours are Tuesday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Administrative hours are from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. Admission is free of charge.

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