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GO PEANUTS

Meet Charlie Brown, Linus, and the whole comic strip gang at the Western Reserve Historical Society February 5–May 15. **Good Grief!** is an educational exhibition honoring the genius of cartoonist Charles Schultz. Interactive displays let kids walk through the Pumpkin Patch, play Shroeder’s piano, get advice from Lucy at her Psychiatry Booth, and navigate the Flying Ace’s WWI plane. Peanuts characters also make special guest appearances. 216.721.5722; www.wrhs.org — L.T.

AMERICAN MODERN

In the spirit of Black History Month, Shaker Square’s **Corcoran Fine Arts celebrates Thomas Sills (1914–2000)**,

a little known, but important, African American abstract expressionist whose paintings haven’t been shown in over 30 years. Through a combination of luck and talent, this son of a North Carolina sharecropper went from unskilled laborer to critically acclaimed artist of



the 1950s and ’60s. The pieces – all for sale – are colorful, lyrical dreamscapes. www.corcoranfinearts.com.

– Laura Taxel

houston

TEXAS-SIZE FUN

Bull riders, bronco busters, and a herd of top rodeo stars will try to lasso prizes in various rodeo competitions beginning March 1, but that’s only part of what has made the nation’s No.1 rodeo, **RodeoHouston**, a family tradition every spring. There are also calf scrambles, chuck wagon races, petting zoos, carnival rides, wine tastings, and a lineup of entertainment representing the spectrum of musical genres through March 20 at Reliant Stadium. The rodeo, established in 1932, now hosts nearly 2,000 guests from 40 countries. Since 1957, it has raised money for scholarships and educational grants, reaching the \$100 million mark this year. 832.667.1000; www.rodeohouston.com. — C.R.



{WHERE TO GO: TUCSON}

Buried Treasure

THE IMPACT OF A DROP OF WATER DOESN’T OFTEN CAUSE 15 PEOPLE TO stop talking, but if it’s from a stalactite on **Kartchner Caverns’** 100-foot-high ceiling, expect silence.

The state-of-the-art caves, 50 miles southeast of Tucson, are among the world’s 10 most important mineralogical sites, according to Ellen Bilbrey, the public information officer for Kartchner Caverns. They were developed to preserve the incredible calcite formations and to educate the public. The dank environment tunnels under an unlikely spot — the hot, dry Chihuahuan desert. Outside, the evaporation rate is 800 times as great as it is inside the cave, where the humidity is a sopping 98 percent.

If they had been discovered by different explorers, the caves might now be home to graffiti and dried, broken rock. But amateur spelunkers Randy Tufts and Gary Tenen endeavored to preserve their perfect find. They stumbled upon the caves in November 1974 while exploring a sinkhole that Tufts had found in the Whetstone Mountains. “Here we had a cave that was completely intact, pristine, no footprints,” says Tenen. They named it Xanadu, after a semimythic city mentioned in Samuel Coleridge’s poem “Kubla Khan.”

It took years to secretly map Xanadu’s football field-size rooms and treasures. Among the formations discovered inside was, at 21 feet, one of the world’s longest “soda straws” (a hollow stalactite with water dripping through it).

From naming and mapping, Tufts and Tenen’s thoughts turned to preservation. They decided the best way to keep the caves pristine, was, ironically, to develop them. Tufts and Tenen alerted the Kartchners, who owned the land, and worked with them to secure financing through the Arizona State Park System. In 1988, after they got Governor Bruce Babbitt to tour the caves, the state bought the land, and the public finally learned of this buried treasure.

Since then, more than \$34 million has been sunk into research and the development of the caverns in the form of 2,200 feet of handicapped-accessible concrete trails and elaborate monitoring systems to keep them clean and pure. — Deborah Abrams Kaplan

58 feet is the height of Kubla Khan, Arizona’s tallest mineral column, found in Kartchner Caverns

Source: www.pr.state.az.us

COURTESY OF CAVERNS STATE PARK (CAVE), THOMAS SILLS