LEOH Trip

Rice University

October 14, 2026









Jim Parsons
Preservation Houston
Programs and Communications Director
Architectural Historian and Storyteller

Jim shared Rice's beginnings and some of its rich history, as he led a campus walking tour.

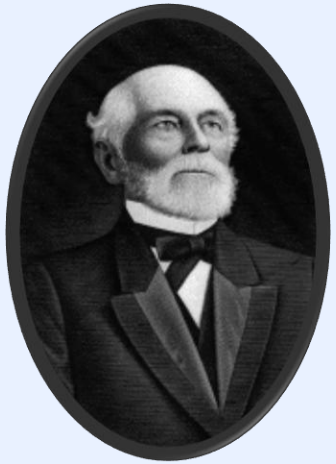
William Marsh Rice, one of 10 children, was a high school dropout who began clerking in a general store. By the age of 21, he owned his own store.

He moved to Texas in 1838. Over the next 20 years he became wealthy providing supplies to plantation owners selling cotton and sugar crops. Slave labor was a common practice for these owners and for Rice himself.

The William M. Rice Institute for the Advancement of Literature, Science and Art filed its state charter at the Texas capital in 1891. The charter stipulated that tuition would be free to white residents of Texas.

Following the Civil War, Rice left Texas and moved north. He was murdered in New York in September 1900 by his butler and lawyer in an attempt to steal his fortune.

In 1904, Rice's bequest of $4.6 million went to Rice as intended. The Institute's trustees chose **Edgar Odell Lovett**, a Princeton University mathematician, as Rice's first President.



William Marsh Rice



Edgar Odell Lovett



A statue of Edgar Odell Lovett resides in a large courtyard on campus.
He served from 1908 – 1946.

The statue was dedicated by the Wortham Foundation
in October 2012 as part of the Rice University Centennial,
in honor of Gus Sessions Wortham.
In addition, the Lovett family honored Martha and Malcolm Lovett.



Note: A statue of founder William Marsh Rice was moved
at some point to a location off campus.

The first class at Rice consisted of a total of 77 male and female students and around 12 faculty.
Thanks to Lovett and James Addison Baker Jr., who chaired the Board of Trustees until 1941, Rice grew in size and importance. Graduate programs were included from the beginning, with the first doctorates awarded in 1918.

Black students were prohibited from admission until 1964.
Rice now serves a flourishing and diverse student population in the thousands.

Programs and facilities, such as the **Shepherd School of Music**, the **Kinder Institute for Urban Research**, and the **Baker Institute for Public Policy**, continue to expand.
Financial aid and scholarships have aided in ensuring continued student growth.



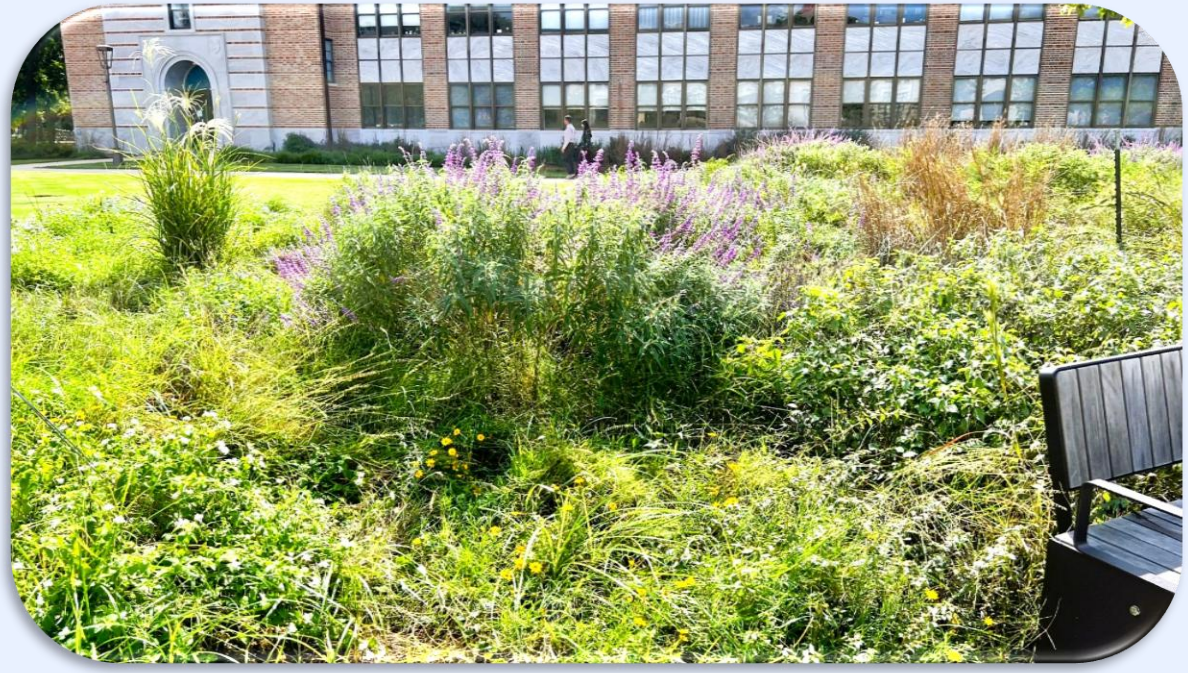


Rice University is currently ranked No. 17 in National Universities
(U.S. News & World Report 2026 edition)

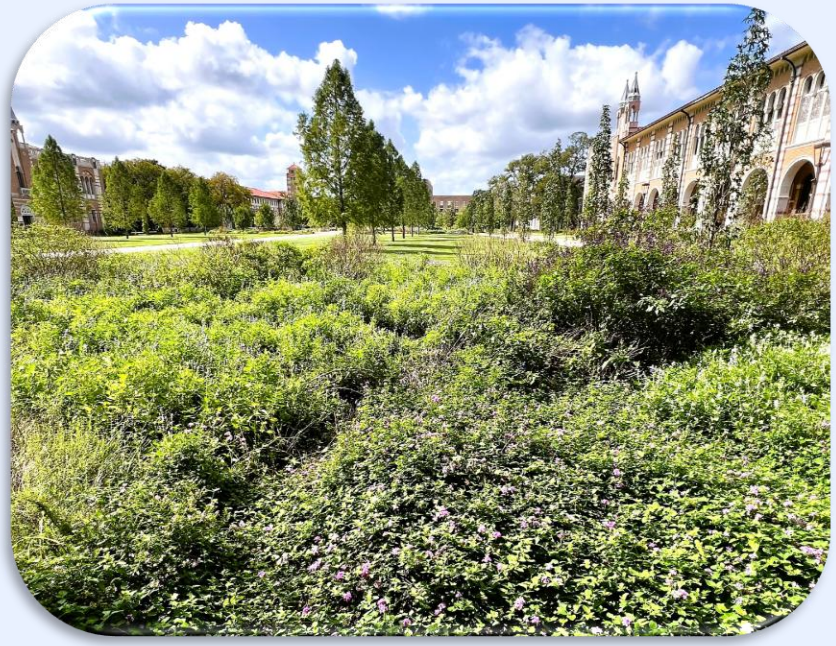
Learn much more on their website **rice.edu**.



James Addison Baker, Jr.







Rice University is described as a 300-acre forested campus. Many of those trees shade the driving and walking campus areas.

As members learned from a previous lecture at one of the LEOH meetings, the *Lynn R. Lowery Arboretum* is assisting in recreating the natural wetlands and prairie ecosystems at Rice within the Harris Gully Natural Area.



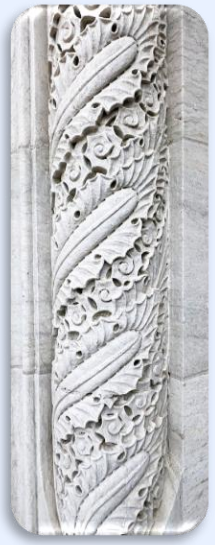


Spending time within the iconic archway during the tour was an opportunity to stay out of the sun!

The iconic ***Lovett Hall*** began as Rice's administrative building. Built in 1912 by architect Ralph Adams Cram, the Neo-Byzantine building is 300 feet long, but only 50 feet wide. Rice President Lovett insisted that it be thin for ventilation purposes in Houston's hot and humid weather. It is constructed of pink Texas granite, gray Ozark marble, and rose-colored Houston brick.

The Hall originally housed classrooms, a library, and the office of the President. It currently houses the Admissions Office and Visitor Services.

Passing through the sallyport, or arched portal, is a famous rite of passage for Rice students. Incoming freshmen walk through the sallyport as they officially enter Rice as students. Graduates exit through the sallyport to begin the next chapter of their lives.

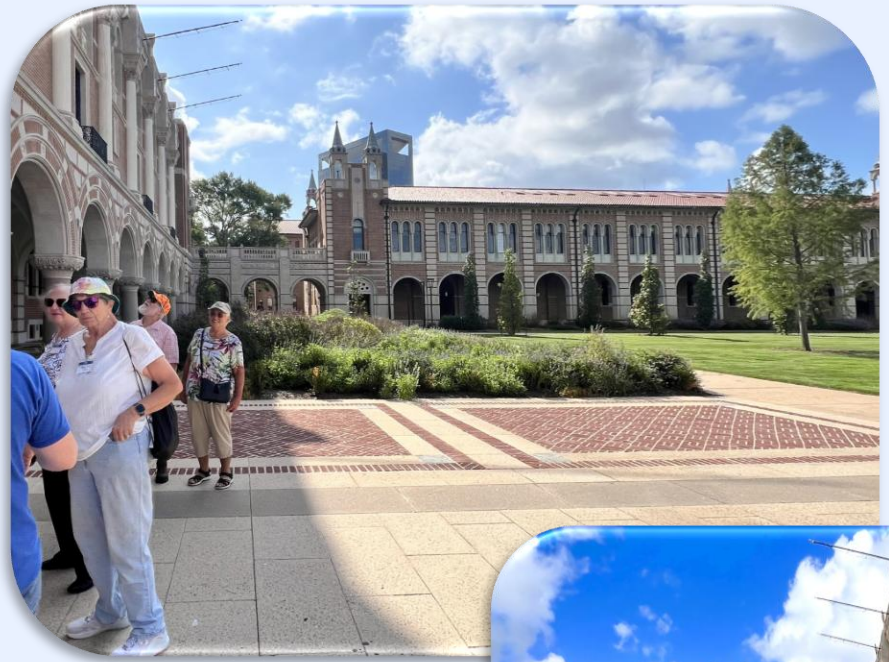


Columns around the entrance/exit of the sallyport were carved in place following their installation.



The middle figure atop a column is possibly a freshman studying for an exam, as opposed to his footballer alter ego on the right. Both admire and desire the lovely classmate strolling by.





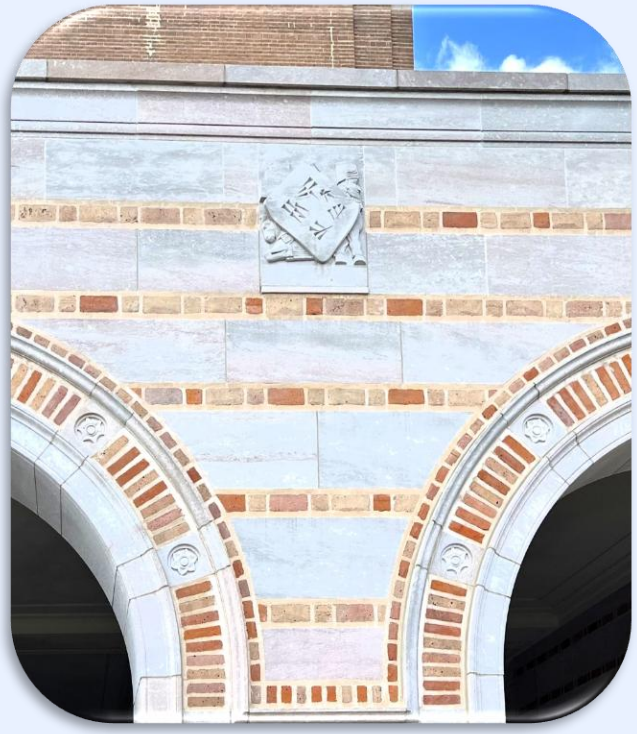


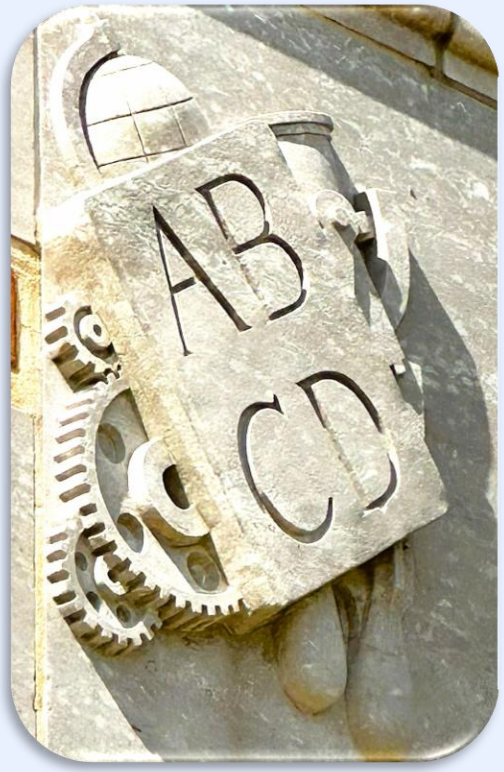




Proceeding through the academic quadrangle toward the library, our guide noted that the various buildings architecture varied from each other yet also complemented each other. Terracotta roofs were noted on several buildings.

Inlaid brick on the walkway also complemented the architecture.









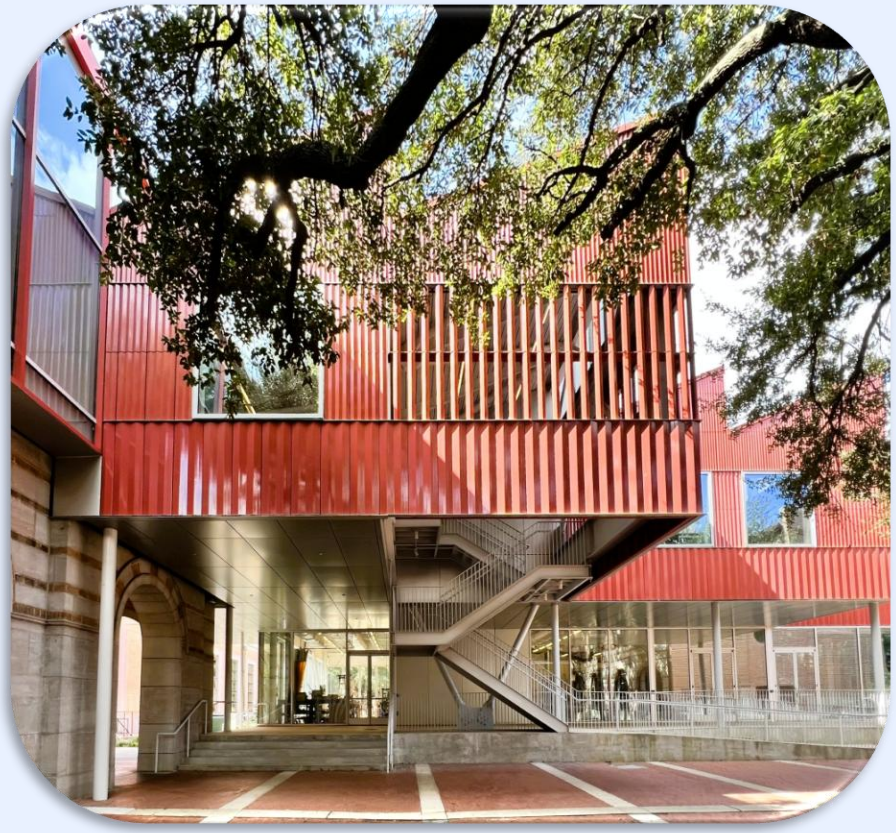


The six-story ***Fondren Library*** was named for major donor Walter W. Fondren, co-founder of the Humble Oil & Refining Company. Designed by Houston architect John F. Staub and completed in 1949, it exhibits an art deco influence.

The library is at the heart of Rice learning and research.
Everyone enjoyed viewing and learning about some of the symbols displayed on the facade. Some are obvious, such as the ones displaying “ABC”.

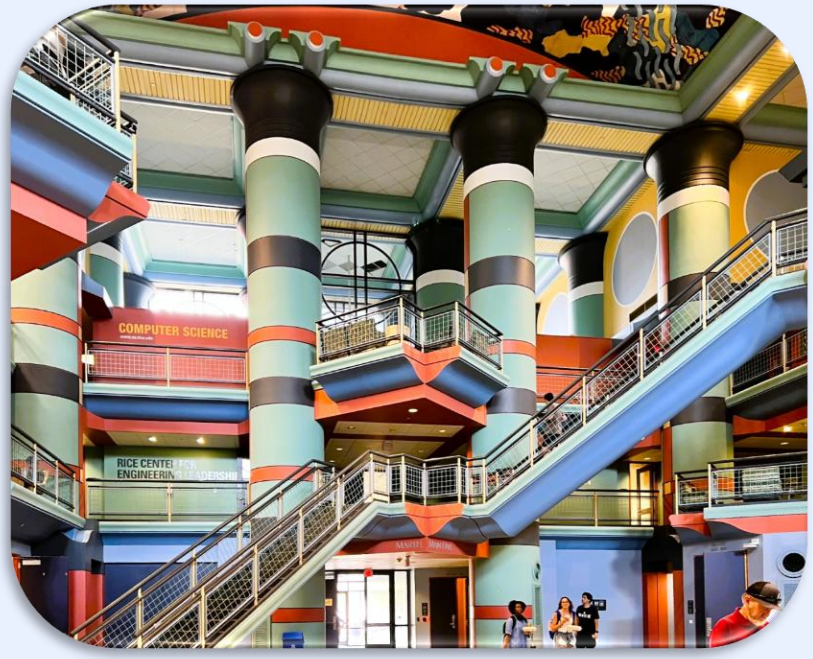
Part of the library is dedicated to NASA. President John F. Kennedy’s speech at Rice in 1962 when he declared that “we choose to go to the moon…” boosted the space program. Several Rice graduates have become astronauts.





The next stop was ***Smith Courtyard***, located between the Cannady and Anderson Halls. We had the opportunity to sit for a time as we listened to our guide and admired the more modern structure that is the ***William T. Cannady Hall for Architecture***, named for professor emeritus Cannady.
The building incorporates recyclable materials and flexible design to easily accommodate future changes. The terracotta facade is intended to match that of roofing and architectural features of other Rice buildings.

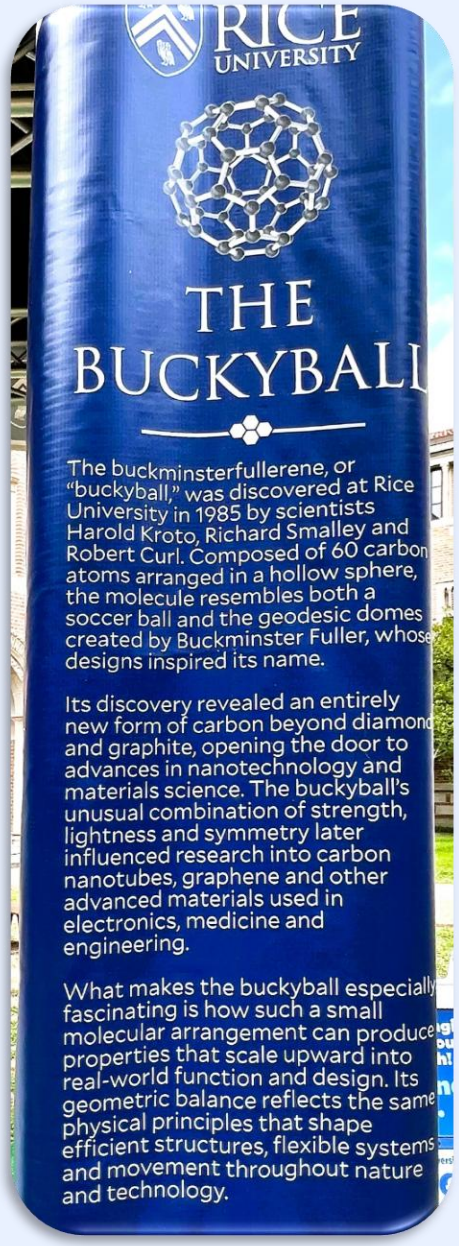






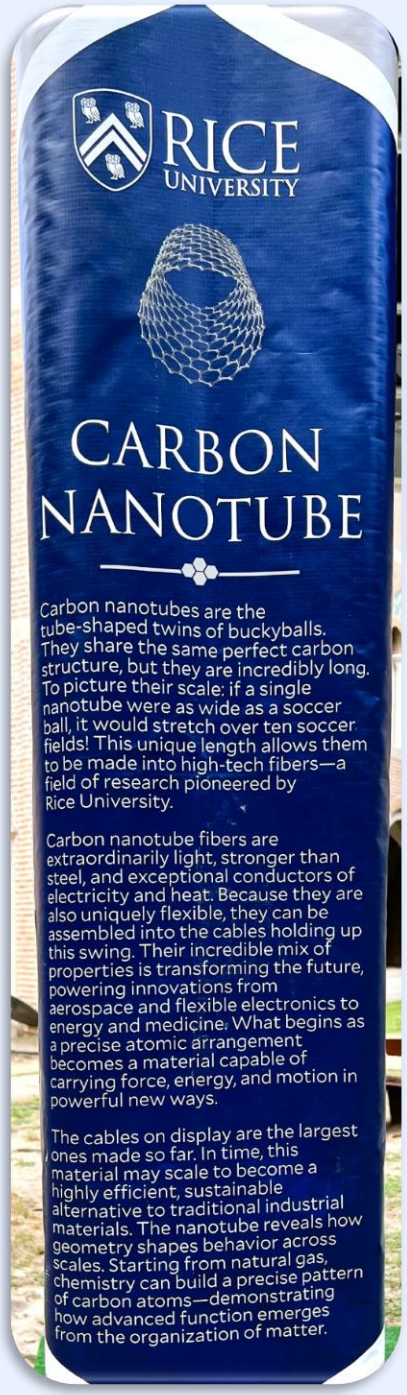


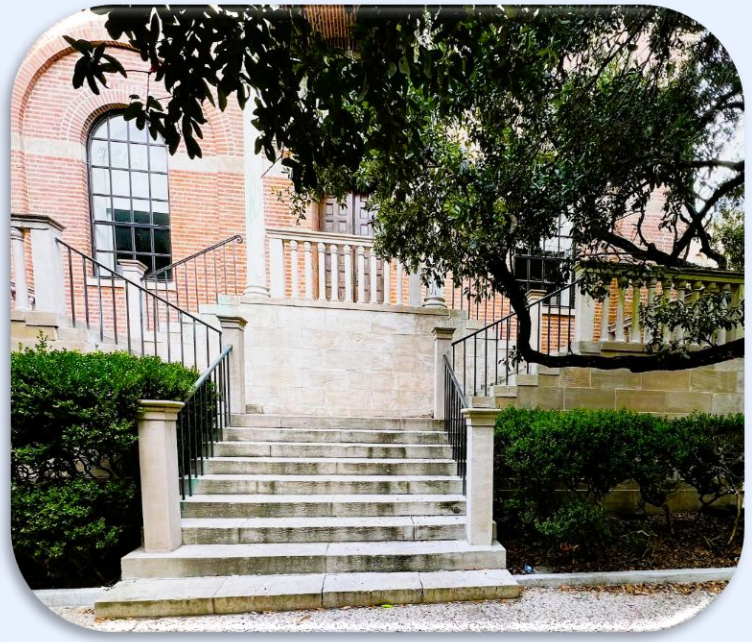
The ***Anne and Charles Duncan Hall*** is the home of the George R. Brown School of Engineering and Computing. The building's exterior by architect John Outram is distinctive; however, the interior of its Martel Main Hall is even more amazing! Pictured to the right, *The Birth of Consciousness* ceiling was created by the same architect.





These large outdoor displays are a reminder of one of the biggest scientific breakthroughs that just happened to have occurred at Rice.





The basement in **Keck Hall** has housed a graduate student hangout and pub for over 50 years. Known as ***Valhalla*** (in Norse mythology a great hall *where Odin receives the souls of heroes fallen bravely in battle*, it once had a "secret club" type reputation; however, these days it is open to anyone of drinking age (closed on Saturdays and cash only)!



Following the tour, we were ready for lunch at **Hungry's** in Rice Village. Their menu is advertised as *New American*. This restaurant and **The '401 Restaurant** in Bellaire are operated by the same family!

(The '401 caters our LEOH Party Day meals)

Fittingly, the drink to the right was served in a LEOH -themed glass!



Our Precinct One bus drivers are camera-shy but greatly appreciated!





Thanks to LEOH's trip coordinator, **Ann Fairchild**, we enjoyed another fun and truly educational trip!

November & December Adventures

Thursday, November 12: *Bayou Wildlife Zoo & lunch at The Adriatic Café Italian Grill*



Thursday, December 3: *Holiday Lunch at Escalante's Meyerland*
An unwrapped child's gift serves as admission fee – benefiting Toys for Tots



Full details follow closer to trip dates

Signing Up for a Trip

Trip Coordinator Ann Fairchild may be contacted at **fairann@sbcglobal.net** or **281-686-1325**.
She will publish complete trip details, with the opportunity to sign up, closer to the trip date.
If the traveler quota is full, you may ask to be put on a waiting list.