

Welcome to the 2008 Festival

Diana Parker, Festival Director

The Festival is always wondrous, and this year is no exception. You will meet winemakers from Texas, Bhutanese silk weavers, and robotic engineers from NASA. All are masters of their trades, who can share deep knowledge of their arts and occupational skills with you. What makes the Festival truly extraordinary, however, is that the juxtaposition of programs creates an event that is greater than the sum of its fascinating parts.

We are often asked how we put together each year's combination of programs. The answer is we don't. It takes several years to produce programs, and the mix of programs is based on timing rather than planning. Selecting a program for the Festival is a very democratic process. Anyone can recommend one; curators, audience members, ambassadors, state department officials, and friends have suggested recent programs. We answer four questions about an exhibit before we proceed:

- ✦ Is there an interesting story that will work as a Festival program?
- ✦ Are there specialists who can help us research and shape the story?
- ✦ Are there overriding issues that might make it impossible to produce the program?
- ✦ Are we confident that we can fund it?

When we are satisfied with the answers to these questions, we schedule a program in the next available year. As you might imagine, this process creates some surprising combinations.

As we slotted this year's three programs into the schedule, we inspired some especially puzzled looks. But once we decided to produce the programs, the fun began. While the Bhutan, NASA, and Texas programs were conceived, documented, funded, and organized separately, their staffs still found surprising overlap.

To begin with, Texas is home to the Johnson Space Center, NASA's center for human spaceflight activities. We learned that the campus of The University of Texas at El Paso is filled with Bhutanese-style buildings, thanks to a dean's wife who fell in love with photographs published in *National Geographic* magazine in the early 1900s. And Bhutan, for years, has commemorated the U.S. space program with postage stamps.

At the Festival, we explore some even more interesting intersections. This year, you can hear an astrologer from Bhutan and an astronaut from NASA discuss the heavens and a Texas singer-songwriter sing "Have You Ever Seen Dallas from a DC-9 at Night?" The next day, you can ask a specialist from NASA's food lab and a chuckwagon cook from Texas about preparing food for remote locations. And I guarantee that before the Festival is over, traditional Bhutanese will dance to time-honored Texas dance tunes, and Texas musicians will learn dances from Bhutanese.

All of us face similar situations in our lives. Nowhere but here at the Festival can you enjoy such a rich variety of interpretations of our common circumstances.