

First Annual 3 Catfish Tournament a Big Catch for Zavalla

by The Zavalla Eagle Staff

The 1st Annual Woodsman's Scholarship Fund 3 Catfish Tournament made waves on Sam Rayburn Lake April 11–13, 2025, drawing 14 competitive teams, community supporters, and a whole lot of East Texas pride.

Organized by Jamie Dykes of Zavalla, the event honored the memory of Richard “Man” Babb and David Howard, both Zavalla High School graduates, through two newly created scholarships: The "Man" and The "Circle H."

“We had a great turnout,” Dykes said. “Thanks to all the fishermen and women, and everyone who came out to support us—we’re proud to give two big scholarships this year.”

The tournament featured strong showings, including the all-female team Catfish Cuties, but it was the Mud Cats team, who swept the competition with a 1st Place Stringer – \$2,375, Big Blue – \$700, Big Op – \$700, plus a free entry into the David Holland Neches River Catfish Tournament. Not to be outdone, Whopper Stoppers snagged the \$700 Big Channel Cat prize.



left: 1st Place Mud Cats
Center: Whopper Stoppers
Above: Catfish Cuties
Team Member

With calm waters, fierce competition, and heartfelt purpose, the event was more than just a fishing tournament—it was a celebration of community, memory, and opportunity. Organizers are already looking ahead to next year’s tournament, aiming to grow the event and its impact. As Zavalla rallies behind local efforts to support students and spark tourism, the tournament stands as another proud example of the Heart of the Lake in action.

Reclaiming Zavalla’s Future: A Case for Tourism-Driven Revival

by The Zavalla Eagle Staff

Once sustained by the timber industry and the hardworking spirit of East Texas, Zavalla, like many small towns across rural America, has felt the sting of economic transition. The sawmills are quiet, the jobs fewer, and the population has slowly declined. Yet, nestled in the heart of the Pineywoods at the Heart of Lake Sam Rayburn and surrounded by natural beauty, Zavalla holds something more valuable than industry: the potential to become a thriving destination for tourism, recreation, and community-driven economic development. This isn’t just wishful thinking—it’s a path that many other towns have walked successfully.

The Data is Clear: Tourism Revitalizes Communities

According to the U.S. Economic Development Administration, rural communities that invest in tourism see substantial gains in employment, income, and business development. The USDA has echoed this, noting that rural counties with recreation-based economies experience higher growth rates across the board.

In towns where the mills have closed and the jobs have vanished, tourism has stepped in—not as a replacement, but as a reinvention. Take Lanesboro, Minnesota, for example. Once dependent on agriculture, it now thrives on bike trails, local art, and riverfront festivals. Its Main Street is alive with small businesses and visitors year-round. Or Abingdon, Virginia, which pivoted from railroads to the arts and heritage tourism and now draws in millions in visitor spending.

Zavalla already has what many towns had to build from scratch: natural assets. Lake Sam Rayburn is a nationally known fishing destination. The Angelina National Forest is rich with hiking trails, birdwatching, and pine-covered serenity. What’s missing isn’t potential—it’s promotion and investment.

Tourism Brings Jobs—and Keeps Money Local

Tourism doesn’t just bring visitors; it creates jobs. The Small Business Administration reports that rural tourism encourages the growth of small enterprises in food, lodging, outdoor gear, and arts. In Paducah, Kentucky, a former river trade town, local creatives and quilters built a vibrant arts scene that drew national attention—and economic dollars. Zavalla, with its proximity to Lufkin, scenic byways, and easy access to the outdoors, could be the launchpad for a wave of local entrepreneurship.

More than that, tourism puts money directly into city coffers. With proper infrastructure—lodging taxes, local sales taxes, and event permits—Zavalla can build its budget without raising taxes on residents. These revenues can then support beautification projects, parks, or even community events that further draw interest.

Heritage and Nature: Zavalla’s Unique Advantage

Unlike urban tourism centers, Zavalla doesn’t need to invent an identity. Its character is already here: a small town rooted in forest traditions, family values, and East Texas grit. That’s marketable—and it’s increasingly in demand. Travelers are seeking authentic, off-the-beaten-path experiences, especially those tied to culture, history, and nature.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation reports that heritage tourists spend more money and stay longer than typical tourists. If Zavalla were to highlight its past—perhaps through a small museum, walking tour, or historical signage—alongside its fishing, trails, and festivals, it would appeal to both heart and wallet.

Zavalla’s Opportunity: A Blueprint in Progress

The upcoming 125th Anniversary of Zavalla this June is more than a celebration—it’s a chance to launch a new narrative. The “Pineywoods Possum Walk,” featuring QR-coded hidden possums on local trails, is exactly the kind of interactive, family-friendly experience that turns heads. Events like this invite repeat visitation, social media buzz, and a sense of playfulness that sets Zavalla apart. This kind of tourism is low-impact, high-reward, and community-oriented. It honors the land and invites others to do the same.

Building the Future Together

Tourism isn’t a silver bullet—but it is a powerful tool in Zavalla’s economic toolbox. With strategic planning, partnerships with regional and state tourism boards, and a little creative energy, Zavalla can craft a sustainable, vibrant future.

The story of many small towns is one of decline. But Zavalla has the opportunity to write a different ending: one of resilience, revival, and reconnection to its roots. The forests haven’t gone anywhere. The lake still shimmers in the sun. All that’s missing is a new reason to come—and a community ready to welcome the world.



UPCOMING
EVENTS

MAY

03

ZAVALLA COMMUNITY TRASH OFF DAY

DROP OFF AT PCT 4 BARN OFF HWY 63

11

MOTHER’S DAY




17

ZAVALLA VFD ANNUAL BENEFIT BASS TOURNAMENT

@CASSELS BOYKIN PAVILLION
PROCEEDS BENEFIT YOUR LOCAL
VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT

21


ZAVALLA KINDERGARTEN GRADUATION

ZAVALLA ISD 8:30 AM


23

ZAVALLA HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

ZAVALLA ISD



24

PINEYWOODS POSSUM WALK

KICKS OFF @CASSELS-BOYKIN’S PARK
TRAILS AND WILL INCLUDE OTHER AREA
TRAILS THROUGH JUNE 30TH

26

MEMORIAL DAY

*All gave some...
But some gave
ALL*



Choices

by Albert Hensarling, Pastor

Life is a constant series of choices and we all make them everyday, some are good and wise, while others are wrong and foolish. We all strive to make the right choices but it’s through the bad choices we learn many of life’s lessons. In the Bible, found in the Old Testament we see Israel made a lot of choices, to obey and follow God, or to disobey God and not follow God. When they followed God , God blessed, and when they disobeyed they often found themselves in captivity. Today, we because of our sinful nature are disobedient to God and are captives of sin. How often do we hear of and make “New Years”resolutions, turning over a new leaf, and more often than not we fail to. I’m reminded of a verse found in Joshua 24:15 And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve;whether the Gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood , or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell;,but as for me and my house, we serve the Lord. A choice needs to be made, we can’t serve self and the devil and still try to serve God. My God is a jealous God and wants full custody not just Sunday visitation. Each choice we make comes with consequences that we have to deal with. Every saved individual has a past, but we don’t have to live there anymore. Jesus Christ offers forgiveness and wipes our slate clean. As a Christian we are still going to fail, but God is faithful to forgive and restore if we ask for forgiveness. I’m a sunny that’s been

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Zavalla’s Easter Events Strengthen Community Bonds

by Honey Casey

An Easter Celebration

On April 19, 2025, the Zavalla ISD Athletic Complex buzzed with joy as four local churches—Solid Rock Baptist, Ozias Missionary Baptist, Zavalla First Baptist, and Sulphur Springs Church—hosted the Zavalla Community Easter Event. The following morning, the community gathered again for a Sunrise Easter Service at Cassels-Boykin Pavilion on Lake Sam Rayburn. These events, blending fun, faith, and fellowship, showcased Zavalla’s commitment to rebuilding community ties in an era of growing isolation.

The Easter Event drew families for a day of celebration. Children from infants to fifth graders hunted for eggs, their laughter echoing across the complex. Bounce houses provided endless entertainment, while a 5K color run and other races energized participants of all ages. Free hot dogs, Frito pie, cotton candy, popcorn, and drinks ensured no one went hungry, fostering a sense of shared abundance. Yet, the event’s heart lay in its spiritual core. Youth from Solid Rock Baptist presented a moving dramatization of Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection, reminding attendees of Easter’s deeper meaning. Pastor Joel Hitchcock of Solid Rock offered a prayer and a message on Easter’s significance, while Pastor Stephen Forrest of Zavalla First Baptist encouraged attendance at the next day’s sunrise service.

Despite overcast skies threatening rain, the Community Sunrise Easter Service on April 20 at 7:30 a.m. saw a strong turnout. Held at the scenic Cassels-Boykin Pavilion, the service united people from Zavalla’s churches. The First Baptist Church worship team led uplifting songs, setting tone of worship and celebration. Pastor Joel delivered the invocation and introduced Mr. Standbury from Huntington, who spoke on Mark 16, emphasizing the stone rolled away from Jesus’ tomb and the personal “stones” we can overcome through faith. The service closed with more worship led by the First Baptist team, and Pastor Forrest urged everyone to find a home church or attend a service later that day.

These events exemplify how shared experiences can counter the disconnection plaguing modern communities. In the U.S., social isolation is rising—studies show only 20% of people regularly interact with neighbors, down from 30% decades ago. Loneliness, linked to health issues like depression, and declining civic engagement, with local voter turnout often below 20%, highlight the need for communal efforts. Zavalla’s Easter gatherings offered a remedy by creating inclusive, low-barrier spaces for connection.

The Easter Event’s free food and activities removed economic barriers, ensuring broad participation. The egg hunt and bounce houses engaged children,

while the 5K run drew adults, fostering multigenerational bonds. The dramatization and Pastor Joel’s message grounded the fun in shared values, reinforcing cultural ties. Similarly, the Sunrise Service’s lakeside setting and collective worship created a sacred space for reflection and unity. Mr. Standbury’s message resonated universally, encouraging personal growth through faith, while Pastor Forrest’s call to join a church emphasized ongoing community involvement.

These gatherings also strengthened trust and collaboration among Zavalla’s churches. By pooling resources, Solid Rock, Ozias, Zavalla First Baptist, and Sulphur Springs demonstrated unity, amplifying their impact. The involvement of local leaders like Pastors Joel and Stephen, alongside community members like Mr. Standbury, highlighted the power of grassroots efforts. Such initiatives echo successful models elsewhere, like Ohio towns boosting event attendance by 40% through similar collaborations. Zavalla’s Easter events built community by offering spaces for joy, reflection, and connection. They reminded attendees that, like the stone rolled away in Mark 16, barriers to fellowship can be overcome through shared faith and effort. As Pastor Forrest urged, finding a home church sustains these bonds, ensuring Zavalla remains a place where neighbors know and support one another.





Zavalla ISD Celebrates Class of 2025 and Kindergarten Graduates By The Zavalla Eagle Staff

Pride will soar as the Zavalla ISD community celebrates its graduating Class of 2025. This year, 17 seniors will receive their diplomas, marking the end of their high school journey, while 10 kindergarten students take their first big step as they graduate to first grade.

Carrying the school motto, “Eagles Fly as One,” the celebration is a true community affair. One of the most beloved traditions—the annual Walk the Halls event—brings together both graduating classes. Seniors don their caps and gowns and parade through the school hallways, cheered on by students, staff, and proud families. The Senior Graduation will be held on May 23rd. Full details will be released from Zavalla ISD closer to the date.

The kindergarten class, taught by educator Tammi Lawson, has worked hard all year and will be honored alongside the seniors in a joint celebration of growth and achievement. Kindergarten Graduation is scheduled for May 21st at 8:30am.

Zavalla ISD is proud of every Eagle taking flight this year, from the smallest wings to the strongest. Congratulations, Class of 2025 and kindergarten graduates—your journey is just beginning.

Zavalla Community Resources

ZAM Outreach, Inc.
Thrift Shop - 1043 E. Main St.
Open Mon, Fri, and Sat 10a to 2p

Zavalla Food Pantry
21898 S. Hwy 69
Open 1st and 2nd Tuesdays 8-10am

The Little Free Food Pantry and Library
Under the Gazebo at Blueberry Bog
116 W Main St

Food Handouts Monthly in Community
First Baptist Church - 1034 E Main St
2nd Mondays - 10am till gone
Johnson Baptist Church - 26534 US 69
1st Saturdays at 10am till gone

Jaime West
(936) 404-2283
Zavalla, TX

Theweststay Airbnb 2.0

The West Stay 2.0

Pineywoods Possum Walk Invites Adventure and Discovery in Zavalla, Texas

Get ready to lace up your hiking boots and explore the natural beauty and rich history of Zavalla, Texas, with the inaugural Pineywoods Possum Walk to celebrate the 125th anniversary of Zavalla’s founding by the T&NO Railroad June 1900. Hosted by Zavalla Prairie Community Connections, this unique event kicks off Memorial Day Weekend 2025 (May 24-26) and runs through July 1, inviting locals and tourists alike to uncover the treasures of Angelina County’s trails while hunting for hidden possums marked with QR codes.

Designed to boost tourism and celebrate the region’s outdoor offerings, the Pineywoods Possum Walk transforms a leisurely hike into an exciting adventure. Participants will search for cleverly hidden possums along some of Zavalla’s most scenic and historic trails, including Cassels-Boykin Park, Boykin Springs Recreation Area, the Old Aldridge Sawmill Trail, and Bouton Lake Recreation Area within the Angelina National Forest. Each week, new possums will be placed on a designated trail, with locations announced via www.zavallacommunity.org, keeping the hunt fresh and engaging.

“Zavalla is a gateway to adventure, history, and nature,” said Honey Casey, Director of Zavalla Prairie Community Connections. “From the serene beauty of Boykin Springs to the haunting ruins of the Old Aldridge Sawmill, this event encourages everyone to step outside, explore our trails, and connect with our community’s story—all while having a chance to win some great prizes.”

