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**Don't have  
to go far to  
be in Texas**  
» A7





# EMPIRE

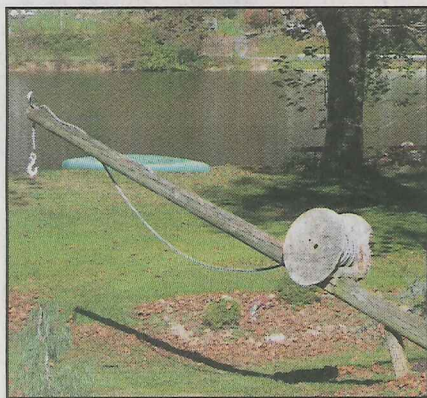
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**Inside**  
Pinning Bromberg into a genre has always been hard.

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JOE TENNIS/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

A giant fishing rod on the New River in Southwest Virginia, near the Pulaski-Wythe county border, may be hooked to the legend of the un-catch-able catfish named Junkyard Bill.

## On big fish tale for free fishing days

**A**LLISONIA, Va. — Just about everyone with a rod and reel tried to hook Junkyard Bill.

But, it's been told, that legendary swimmer simply remained the New River's "un-catch-able catfish."



**Joe Tennis**

Tennis Anyone?

At least, all this is according to Patrick McFall, a ranger, historian and interpretive specialist at the New River Trail State Park.

On van tours, McFall freely shares the story of Junkyard Bill: a tale that's been passed down for years but also one that explains— well, maybe — why a giant fishing rod stands near the street in the riverside village of Allisonia in Pulaski County, Virginia.

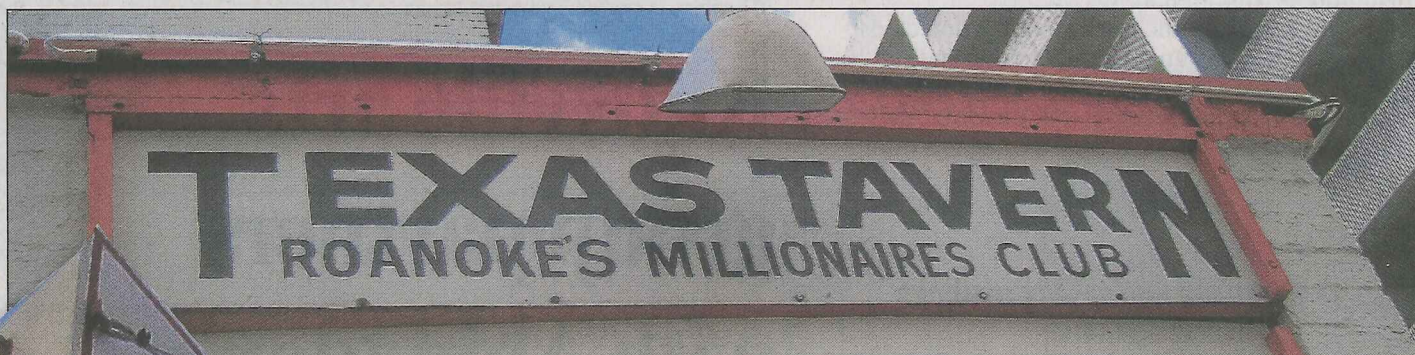
As the story goes, all aimed to snag the lips of Junkyard Bill. "But no one could," McFall said. "He would always just steal their bait."

Then along came a man in a boat on the New River. While fishing, that man suddenly noticed the huge head of a catfish popping out of the water — so big — that it measured

## LET'S GO RETRO

— Third in an Occasional Series —

Let's go to the Texas Tavern and discover why this landmark of downtown Roanoke is such a jewel — and open 24 hours at a time. It hasn't changed since the 1930s!



PHOTOS BY JOE TENNIS/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

Known as "Roanoke's Millionaires Club," the Texas Tavern features hot dogs, hamburgers and "chile." The old-fashioned "EAT" sign, left, hangs above the entrance to the Texas Tavern. Matt Bullington, below, is the owner of the Texas Tavern, a restaurant started by his great-grandfather.



# Don't have to go far to be in Texas



Known as "Roanoke's Millionaires Club," the Texas Tavern features hot dogs, hamburgers and "chile." The old-fashioned "EAT" sign, left, hangs above the entrance to the Texas Tavern. Matt Bullington, below, is the owner of the Texas Tavern, a restaurant started by his great-grandfather.



# Don't have to go far to be in Texas

BY JOE TENNIS  
BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

**R**OANOKE, Va. — With a name like Texas, you might expect something big.

Well, at the Texas Tavern, what's big comes in the open-all-night attitude that welcomes all walks of life.

Just look at that funny promise on the wall: "We Seat 1,000 PEOPLE ... 10 AT A TIME."

Explanation: The tiny Texas Tavern only has 10 seats. Yet it's not uncommon to boast a line of patrons waiting on the street.

It's been this way since the Great Depression, when owner Issac Bullington opened the eatery on Feb. 13, 1930.

Today, countless orders later, the short-order grill still sizzles with hamburgers, hot dogs and "chile."

"We don't monkey with the menu," said Matt Bullington, a great-grandson of the restaurant's founder.

The dark-haired Bullington now runs the restaurant, after taking it over a few years ago from his father, James N. Bullington.

## 'Get 'em all'

Painted red, black and white, the Texas Tavern does not close — except for a day and a half at Christmas. Otherwise, it's open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

"The busiest one or two hours on any given week is between midnight and 3 a.m. on Friday or Saturday night," Bullington said. "But we usually do a good lunch business. And sometimes we'll be busy in the evening."

Restaurant manager Tim Goff enjoys the rush of the night shift. "You get blue collar, white collar, no collar," Goff said. "You get drunks. You get a man who just wants to sober up. You get people getting off on the railroads, cab drivers, street walkers ... You get 'em all."

Diners belly up to the bar in the living room-size dining space, where you sit so close you can watch the cook prepare your order. "We definitely have our regulars," Bullington said. "Literally, I've



The Texas Tavern has been a staple in downtown Roanoke, Va., since 1930. Prices rise gradually at the eatery. The \$1.25 hot dog and hamburgers recently moved up to \$1.30.

## If you go

- » **What & Where:** Texas Tavern, 114 W. Church Avenue, Roanoke, Va.
- » **Info:** (540) 342-4825
- » **Web:** [textastavern-inc.com](http://textastavern-inc.com)



Tim Goff is the manager and longtime cook at the Texas Tavern.



# Tavern

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had four generations of customers come in.”

And, all these years later, that bowl of “chile” has the same flavor, Bullington promised.

The original recipe for the Texas Tavern’s “World Famous Chile” came from a hotel in San Antonio, Texas, Bullington added.

“I have customers almost every day, saying, ‘I’ve been eating here for 60 years, and it tastes the same.’”

## ‘Rubbing elbows’

Bullington rattles off a who’s who list of customers, including three Virginia governors: Linwood Holton, Mark Warner and Tim Kaine.

“All the local politicians come in,” he said.

Sally Struthers, the actress who played Gloria on CBS-TV’s “All in the Family,” stopped in one night, Goff said.

More recently, actor Kevin Costner paid a visit.

“I’ll have a destitute sitting next to millionaires,” Bullington added. “I might have a biker in leather sitting next to a little, old lady all dressed up sitting next to some kid sitting next to a banker next to a

greasy mechanic.”

Bullington laughed.

“They’re all real close, rubbing elbows. And it’s probably the closest that they’ll get to each other in society — at the Texas Tavern.”

This is more than a melting pot.

“We call ourselves ‘Roanoke’s Millionaire’s Club,’” Bullington said. “We’ll treat you like a millionaire.”

And, today, what draws customers may be more than the food.

“It’s about the story. People love the story. It’s unique,” Bullington said. “It’s a slice of Americana. And I think people crave things that don’t change. I’m very careful to never

change the aesthetics of the place.”

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