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**WASHINGTON ON THE BRAZOS HISTORICAL FOUNDATION RECEIVES TRANSFORMATIVE $1 MILLION GIFT FROM THE JOAN AND HERB KELLEHER CHARITABLE FOUNDATION**

Washington on the Brazos, TX – April 8, 2025 - The Washington on the Brazos Historical Foundation is proud to announce a generous $1 million donation from the Joan and Herb Kelleher Charitable Foundation to the "Where Texas Became Texas" Capital Campaign. This historic contribution marks a significant milestone in the Foundation’s capital campaign, supporting the enhancement and preservation of Independence Hall, the birthplace of the Texas Declaration of Independence.

This generous gift will play a crucial role in the expansion and improvement of the historic site, ensuring that the legacy of Texas' journey to independence continues to inspire future generations. This renovation was conceived by the Texas Historical Commission (who manages the site) and reflects the Texas Legislature’s bold vision to invest in revolution and republic sites in preparation for Texas Bicentennial in 2036. The campaign aims to raise $51.6 million from public funds and private philanthropy to rehabilitate and revitalize the historic site. To date, over $50 million has been secured. This renovation is anticipated to increase annual visitation from 90,000 to 120,000 upon completion of the project.

Jim Kolkhorst and Cyndee Smith, campaign co-Chairs, expressed immense gratitude for the Kelleher family's commitment to the preservation of Texas history: "We are deeply thankful to the Joan and Herb Kelleher Charitable Foundation for their tremendous gift. This is a pivotal moment for the Washington on the Brazos Historical Foundation and the Texas Historical Commission as we endeavor to honor the past and build for the future. The Kelleher family’s profound generosity will ensure that the story of Texas and the spirit of those who fought for its independence will be told for generations to come."

Honorary Campaign Chair and Chair of the Texas Historical Commission, John L. Nau III, emphasizes the importance of this site: “At the conclusion of this transformation, Washington-on-the-Brazos will finally receive the recognition it deserves. No other site in the state can tell the story of the people of the Republic of Texas – how their courage, leadership and bravery built an independent nation. As a destination for all Texans, it is inspiring to see generosity from across the state to support this important site. I am so grateful to the Kelleher family for their remarkable gift and leadership in preserving this pivotal piece of Texas history.”

The "Where Texas Became Texas" Capital Campaign will enhance the visitor experience through educational programs, interactive exhibits, and the maintenance of the site's extensive grounds and historic structures. The Kelleher family's donation will specifically assist in the vital preservation efforts of Independence Hall, where 59 delegates bravely declared Texas a sovereign nation on March 2, 1836.

This modest building – a recreation of the original - symbolizes the birthplace of modern Texas and honors the determination and resilience of early Texian settlers. Independence Hall has been an essential part of any tour of Washington-on-the-Brazos for decades. However, it has always stood alone on the townsite until now. Once the exhibits on the townsite are open in Spring of 2026, including fully reconstructed buildings, framed structures, and other markers, Independence Hall will serve as an anchor and orientation point as visitors walk the “town” of Washington. In the newly renovated Star of the Republic Museum, opening in Fall of 2025, visitors will also experience a new interactive Independence Hall exhibit, listening to the delegates debate and make pivotal decisions in the history of Texas.

As the construction project enters its final phase, the Washington on the Brazos Historical Foundation invites the community and history enthusiasts across the state to join in supporting this important campaign. Contributions of all sizes will contribute to preserving the hallowed grounds where Texas forged its identity.

For more information on the "Where Texas Became Texas" Capital Campaign, to make a donation, or to schedule a visit, please visit [www.wheretexasbecametexas.org/capital-campaign](http://www.wheretexasbecametexas.org/capital-campaign).

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About **Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site** | Washington-on-the-Brazos is revered as the site of the signing of the Texas Declaration of Independence on March 2, 1836. Thereafter, despite great personal risk, the delegates continued meeting until they had drafted a constitution and established the new nation’s first lasting government. Located on the Brazos River in Washington County and managed by the Texas Historical Commission, Washington-on-the-Brazos educates visitors about early Texan society, culture, politics, and agriculture, the site ensures that Texas' present and future can benefit from the lessons of its history.

About **Washington on the Brazos Historical Foundation** | Washington on the Brazos Historical Foundation (WOBHF) is a 501c3 nonprofit organization that exists to honor the signers of the Declaration of Independence and their efforts to build a new nation, and to interpret life in Texas during the Republic era. We would welcome your gift to support this campaign. To learn more about the project, please visit [www.wheretexasbecametexas.org/capital-campaign](http://www.wheretexasbecametexas.org/capital-campaign) or follow along on Facebook (facebook.com/WashingtonOnTheBrazosSHS) or Instagram (instagram.com/oldwashingtontx) for updates on the restoration project's construction progress.