

Mo' Entertainment

When Mel Tillis took the stage at the Cailloux Theater in January, it was not only the first time the country music superstar performed in the Hill Country, it also was the debut concert of the 2014 TEXMO Star Concert Series. And Bob Nichols believes it was the beginning of a beautiful relationship.



Promoter Bob Nichols (pictured) is bringing "Branson style" entertainment to the Texas Hill Country. Photo by Phil Houseal

TEXMO is a promotions partnership between Boerne resident Mike Kinchen, one of the founders of Rockbox Theater in Fredericksburg, and Nichols, a Branson entertainment veteran.

"Mike introduced me to the Hill Country, then together we discovered the Cailloux Theater in Kerrville," Nichols said.

The partners spent three months checking out the area, studying the demographics, and even presenting a test concert in October. They decided Kerrville would be a great place to do concerts.

"The geography is positioned to be the kind of place to hold concerts and events. There is a lot of great infrastructure, it has great access from the interstate, it's on the river, and it has a beautiful downtown area," Nichols said. "Mike and I found a strong business community too, eager to bring Branson-style entertainment to the heart of the Hill Country."

What exactly is Branson style entertainment and how is it different from the typical concert performance? "It is an up close and personal experience," said Nichols, who was 3-time Emcee/Comedian of the Year in Branson, and winner of the Pioneer Award for significantly affecting the Branson entertainment marketplace. "One thing entertainers know at Branson is they have to come down to the floor to meet people. People don't want to just go to a concert; they want to talk to the entertainers. Our shows feature a lot of interaction."

Mel Tillis was the first big act TEXMO brought to the Cailloux Theater. Nichols, who has known and worked with Tillis in Branson for 20 years, knew he was the perfect choice to kick off the series. "I call Mel an entertainer's entertainer," Nichols said. "Although he is an award-winning singer and songwriter, he is also an award-winning comedian. In my eyes that makes him an entertainer. He loves to sing, talk, and tell stories. People just like him, and they always want to come back to see his show again and again."

The next act up is Michael Martin Murphey, the Texas native who has been a force in the music business since his breakout hit "Wildfire" in 1975. In addition to other hits, including "Carolina in the Pines," "What's Forever For," "Cosmic Cowboy," "Geronimo's Cadillac" and "Cherokee Fiddle," Murphey is a cowboy poet and ardent supporter of keeping authentic Western heritage fresh and alive.

TEXMO plans to bring at least five more national acts to Kerrville during the year.

TEXMO has already made changes to evoke that Branson theater-going experience. They are now selling concessions that can be consumed inside the theater during the show. Uniformed waitresses proffer popcorn, soda, water and candy GooGoo Clusters, that old-time southern treat. It's all part of the fun, and fun is something Nichols takes very seriously.

"We are a theater company, and we want to provide a theater experience," Nichols said. "That is the point of entertainment; you've got to enjoy yourself."

Nichols said he believes that selling tickets is a lot like selling a much more mundane product.

"My dad sold tires for living. He said, no matter how bad the economy gets people still need tires," Nichols said. "I feel the same way about entertainment. Look at the depression. People still found a nickel to go to a movie; people needed to be entertained. That is the joy that I get, to bring entertainment to people."

Nichols said his goal is for people to "come out and have a good time for their own enjoyment. At same time, they can help us continue to bring great acts to the area."