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shows during the weekend. Two years ago, when Laredo held a similar Tejano Music Awards kickoff weekend, Frank Salazar, producer of the awards show, said the hotels hosting bands morphed into a small concert, as nearly all of the bands sat near the pool and began jam sessions that drew in fans.

And Tejano music fans nationwide are expected to venture to Laredo, then on to San Antonio for the awards, Salazar said.

"The Tejano music is not just Texas music anymore," Salazar said. "It's a culture and in our heritage. The music belongs to Mexican-Americans.

"We've had our hard times in this industry but we're still keeping it alive," he added.

And to ensure Laredoans are familiar with the musicians visiting in February, Belinda Guerra, owner of KJBZ-FM, said Z-93 plans to program the bands' music on air prior to the kickoff.

"What I want to do in conjunction with them is promote Tejano (music), to let people know it's alive and growing," Guerra said. "Every artist that is either nominated or going to be (nominated) in certain categories is going to be played. It's going to be a great marriage."

Guerra said she hopes to reintroduce Tejano music to a generation that has somewhat lost touch with the Mexican-American music.

"I feel like we have some good allies. Laredo has always been a big Tejano town."

FRANK SALAZAR, TEJANO MUSIC AWARDS PRODUCER

Radio and live exposure of these Tejano bands in Laredo is a prime draw for the musicians, Olivares said. Many of them are hoping to break into the Mexican music market, and traveling to the border in Laredo may be their best option.

And while they are here, the bands are also expected to participate in community events. During the past kickoff event, Salazar said several Tejano bands visited cancer patients in the hospital. The bands also set up at Mall Del Norte to sign autographs while in town, he said.

"We want to make a big event, make it a big splash," Salazar said. "I feel like we have some good allies. Laredo has always been a big Tejano town."

The 28th annual Tejano Music Awards in San Antonio will begin with a ceremony honoring winners on March 6. Then March 7 through 9, the fanfare begins in San Antonio's Market Square, where more than 100 bands will play for an estimated 75,000 to 90,000 patrons.

The massive music awards event is one that Olivares said he may soon try to bring to Laredo in addition to the

kickoff. But until then, he plans to make Laredo a destination for Tejano bands, at least in celebration of the upcoming music awards each year.

"It's a culture," Olivares said about Tejano music. "It's deviated a little bit, but the original guys are still there."

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Austin foursome Live Oak Decline taking root in Laredo

By KIRSTEN CROW
LAREDO MORNING TIMES

The Austin-based four-piece band Live Oak Decline is finding new roots in Laredo, returning to Average Joe's Sports Bar and Grill's stage after playing at Gumifest on the Fourth of July.

Using a serene blend of melodic rock, soothing, polished vocals and classic instrumentation, the band produces a sound on their

first CD, "Hello World," that would be equally at home in a laid-back bar or playing in a car on a lazy road trip. The song "Coffee and Cars," in particular, exploits the chill-rock vibe, evoking Counting Crows and Stone Sour.

Mixed and mastered by Nick Brophrey, the brains behind the albums of Avril Lavigne, The Rolling Stones and Everclear, the band is "really happy with what he did with (the CD)," said bassist Keld Ewart.

With band members blending blues,

hip-hop, funk and pop-rock back-grounds, it's a "sound with commercial appeal, but at the same time, we'd consider it ours," Ewart said.

"It's just a rock band with kind of an eclectic sound," he said.

Among the seasoned band members who make up Live Oak Decline is guitarist Greg Combs, who was one of the original members in a fellow Austin band, Dexter Freebish, that released the hits "Leaving Town" and "Prozak," in 2000 and 2004.

The band is named after Live Oak Street, where several of the band mem-

bers once lived, said Ewart. It is also a common reference for a wilt disease that has the potential to kill live oak trees.

Live Oak Decline includes Ewart, Combs, vocalist and guitarist Noah Watson, and pianist Steve Littleton, although Littleton will be absent for the Laredo show.

For more information about

Live Oak Decline, visit liveoakdecline.com or

www.myspace.com/liveoakdecline.

Live Oak Decline takes the stage at 11 p.m. with Derek Lacey at Average Joe's Sports Bar and Grill, located at 9652 McPherson Road.

(Kirsten Crow may be reached at (956) 728-2543 or by e-mail at kirsten@lmtonline.com)



Live Oak Decline includes bassist Keld Ewart, guitarist Greg Combs, vocalist and guitarist Noah Watson, and pianist Steve Littleton. Littleton will be absent for the Laredo show. Courtesy photo