



Bob Phillips

Stories From the BACK ROADS

If you've ever watched Texas Country Reporter, you'll understand why Tanya Bishop, Capital Farm Credit advertising director, calls the show's host, Bob Phillips, "the poster boy for rural Texas."

Every week, for 38 years, Phillips has taken viewers to places around the state, introducing them to people from all walks of life who have interesting talents and hobbies. From the quirky to the heartfelt, he has covered all kinds of stories, each one featuring ordinary, everyday individuals. Many, perhaps most, of the stories are found in rural areas.

"We do stories all over Texas, in the big city and the inner city, but most of the stories are on the back roads," Phillips says.

"We've thought about why that is, and the best reason we can come up with is that people who want to do unique things don't want to gather together with other people. They want their own space."

His evident appreciation for rural people and communities was the main reason Bishop considered him as a possible Farm Credit spokesperson in 2003.

"It seemed like a good fit," Bishop says. "He has a great following. Plus, his demographic keeps getting younger. We thought he would be a good spokesman for us."

Phillips agrees that the partnership was a natural fit. He has been the star of Capital Farm Credit television commercials for almost seven years now.

"When they first approached us about a sponsorship, we did a little research," Phillips recalls. "What we found was that their customers are our viewers, and many of our viewers are their customers. They are one and the same."

City Roots, Country Roots

With his easygoing storytelling style and his affinity for what he calls the "back roads," Phillips could easily be mistaken for a country kid. That's not the full picture, though. He actually grew up in the big city of Dallas, but spent many holidays, weekends and summers outside of the city on a family farm.

He did not own rural land of his own, however, until the late 1990s, when he purchased a ranch in the Texas Hill Country. A

few years later, after he became the Farm Credit spokesperson, he realized where he should go for financing.

“I really didn’t know about the organization until the sponsorship,” Phillips says of First Ag Credit, which later merged to become Capital Farm Credit. “I did some research on them and realized that these are the people we should be going to, and I’ve been a customer since then.”

A Unique Hill Country Getaway

Phillips bought the ranch primarily as an investment, but frequent requests from other people to go and stay there prompted him to see it as a business opportunity. In 2006, he opened Escondida, a beautiful hacienda-style boutique hotel with a world-class spa.

Visitors to Escondida come from across the country. About half of the guests find out about the getaway from watching Texas Country Reporter, either on a local channel from one of the 22 Texas media markets that pick up the show in syndication or on the nationwide RFD-TV satellite/cable network. The other half find the destination through other means, particularly the Internet, and are not aware of the well-known owner.

Guests enjoy luxurious amenities and the most scenic and restful activities the Texas Hill Country has to offer. No matter how they find out about Escondida, as Phillips says in his advertisements, “The hard part isn’t getting here. It’s leaving.”

Growing Up on Television

For Phillips, owning a ranch and a hotel was unplanned and unexpected; it was just one of life’s curious twists and turns. Making a career in television was less of a surprise. Once he got started, at the age of 18, he was hooked.

“I’ve been doing this since 1970,” Phillips says. “I don’t know what else I’d do if I had to find a real job.”

People have literally seen him grow up on television, a fact he remembers when he sees old episodes.

“They [RFD-TV] air our recent shows and also TCR Classics with shows that are 20 years old, sometimes even older. That’s where you’ll see skinny Bob with dark hair,” he says. “I don’t even recognize him anymore,” he says with a laugh.

Although his style has matured, much of what he does has been constant through the years.

“We’re just doing stories on real people, and telling their stories in an entertaining way,” Phillips says. “Charles [Kuralt] pioneered that, and I was lucky enough that he shared it with me early in my career. I wanted to do something similar in Texas.”

Now, with almost four decades of success and more than 2,000 episodes under his belt, Phillips is not even close to slowing down. A national version, called *On the Road with Bob Phillips*, will soon air on RFD-TV. It will be in addition to *Texas Country Reporter*.

“What I found was that people have different accents and cultures, but people are people everywhere we go,” Phillips says.

Miles and Miles of Texas

When Phillips first started the show in 1972, it was a package of stories for a local affiliate, KDFW Channel 4 in Dallas. At that time, it was known as 4 Country

Reporter, and stories had to come from within 100 miles of Dallas. As the show grew, so did the geographic area. When it became syndicated in 1986, he and his production team started covering the entire state. His audience broadened again in 2000 with the introduction of the new satellite/cable network RFD-TV, which Phillips Productions helped to launch.

Given the show’s huge territory, it takes a talented team of hardworking people to produce the show. Fortunately, Phillips has a core team of longtime employees who have each worked with him for more than 20 years. Together, they rack up a lot of driving time.

“Texas is a big place. We’re on the road a lot. I bought two new vehicles on June 1, 2009, and they both already have more than 30,000 miles on them,” Phillips says.

With so much area to cover and so many people to talk to, he never worries about running out of stories.

“As long as people keep having babies in Texas, we won’t run out of stories,” he says. “We were going to interview a 21-year-old, and I realized that he was born since we’ve started the show. New and interesting people are being born all the time. We just have to wait for them to get old enough to talk to them.”



Courtyard at Escondida