

Fiesta® San Antonio Backgrounder

Overview

Fiesta® San Antonio is an 11-day festival that takes place each April in and around San Antonio, Texas. The celebration is coordinated by the Fiesta® San Antonio Commission, a private nonprofit organization.

Fiesta® San Antonio is unusual among U.S. festivals. Its events are produced entirely by local nonprofit organizations (civilian and military). Many of those organizations welcome corporate sponsorships to help pay event expenses. But there are restrictions. No title sponsorships are allowed, for example.¹

During Fiesta® about 100 local nonprofit participating member organizations and military units stage more than 100 official events. Individuals, companies and groups put on many more unofficial activities and parties. Official Fiesta® events include balls, parties, concerts, festivals, parades, exhibits, conferences, athletic events, coronations and historical demonstrations. Fiesta® nonprofit members include schools, colleges, churches, athletic organizations, health organizations, and arts and music groups.

Fiesta® is San Antonio's Party With a Purpose. That's because the income generated by Fiesta® events goes back into the community through scholarships, grants, health services, education, ministries and more.

Fiesta® began in April 1891 when San Antonio women staged a Battle of Flowers in front of the Alamo to commemorate the battles of the Alamo and San Jacinto. The event soon became an annual tradition. Other activities—balls, a carnival, coronations of “royalty”—were soon scheduled to take place in the same week as the Battle of Flowers Parade. Within a decade Fiesta® had become an important local tradition.²

Fiesta has gone by many names in the past 120 years: Carnival, Spring Carnival, Fiesta San Jacinto and, since 1961, Fiesta® San Antonio.

Since 1891 the only years Fiesta® hasn't taken place were during the two World Wars. Over the decades the festival has become a truly multicultural celebration. Fiesta® events today feature many ethnic flavors: Hispanic, African American, Native American, German and others.

Hundreds of different events have come and gone over the years. Historic records show a Trades Parade, synchronized swimming, hot air balloon races, model airplane competitions, shooting competitions, polo matches, street dancing and even a demonstration bullfight. Other events have had staying power. The festival's longest running activities include:

¹ Fiesta® San Antonio Commission Policies and Standards

² *A Century of Fiesta in San Antonio*, Jack McGuire, 1990

- The Battle of Flowers Parade (1891).
- The Coronation of the Queen of The Order of the Alamo (1909).
- Fiesta Oyster Bake (1916).
- The Pilgrimage to the Alamo (1918).
- The crowning of King Antonio (1927).
- A Night in Old San Antonio (1937).
- Fiesta Flambeau Parade (1948).

Some 3 million residents and visitors attend one or more events each year, generating an economic impact of about \$284 million.³ That makes Fiesta[®] the third-biggest event (by economic impact) in the Texas, behind the State Fair of Texas in Dallas and the Houston Stock Show and Rodeo. The International Festivals and Events Association reports unofficially that Fiesta[®] is one of the top 10 events in the world by attendance.

Fiesta[®] San Antonio really is a people's festival. Some 75,000 men, women and children donate millions of hours each year to plan and produce the more than 100 events. Many have been volunteering for decades. They saw their parents and grandparents helping out and have passed the tradition on to their children. It's the same for residents attending Fiesta. Some families have viewed the major parades from the same location for three generations or more.

Some of Fiesta[®] San Antonio's peer events include the Kentucky Derby Festival, the Pasadena Tournament of Roses, New Orleans' Mardi Gras and the Indianapolis 500.⁴

Fiesta San Antonio Commission

Since 1959 the Fiesta[®] San Antonio Commission has coordinated all the details of Fiesta[®]. The commission is a 501(c)(4) organization with almost 100 dues-paying participating member organizations. The commission receives no government funding. Its primary sources of income are:

- Corporate sponsorships.
- A retail operation.
- Business and individual membership dues.
- Proceeds from the Fiesta[®] Carnival.
- License fees from nonprofit organizations "selling" chairs along the parade route.

The Fiesta[®] Commission acts as a liaison between its nonprofit member groups and the city of San Antonio. The commission also coordinates with local military installations, which receive many requests from event producers for support. A city ordinance and associated contract give the commission certain rights during the festival's 11 days. The city supports Fiesta[®] in a variety of ways, including police participation, availability of

³ Fiesta[®] 2007 economic impact survey

⁴ International Festivals and Events Association, ifea.com

public property for Fiesta® events and cleanup after major parades.⁵ Fiesta® would not happen without the support of city leaders and various agencies.

The Fiesta® Commission's all-volunteer governing body is its Board of Commissioners. It's made up of an executive committee, 30 elected commissioners and one commissioner from each of the participating member organizations. The board meets most months to discuss policy and vote on specific issues including the commission's budget and addition of new nonprofit groups to membership.⁶

The Board of Commissioners and the commission's individual and business members elect new leaders and approve bylaws changes, if necessary, at an annual meeting.

The Fiesta® Commission's mission:

The Fiesta® San Antonio Commission Inc. is a nonprofit, volunteer, self-supporting organization that plans, promotes, coordinates and preserves Fiesta® San Antonio through support of its Participating Member Organizations in presenting a safe, educational, annual celebration of the diverse heritage, culture and spirit of San Antonio for its residents and visitors. (Policies and Standards).

The commission supports its participating member organizations in a number of ways:

- It gives more than \$350,000 in allocations to participating member organizations whose events would otherwise lose money.
- It gives grants from its Fiesta® Commission Charitable **Corp., a 501(c)(3) foundation, to many of its (c)(3) participating member organizations.**
- It promotes official Fiesta® events through its website, Facebook page, annual program magazine, schedule brochure, speakers bureau, and other print and electronic media.
- It offers free professional development seminars to its member organizations.
- It pays half the premium of an umbrella insurance policy that covers all official Fiesta® events.
- It produces an annual Media Day when representatives of participating member organizations can meet with local journalists.
- It offers to sell Fiesta® pins and medals from participating member organizations in The Fiesta Store®.
- It provides bleacher seats to the two largest parade organizations. They sell those seats to generate income for their parades.

The Fiesta® Commission gives back to the community in another important way. It licenses more than 100 small nonprofit groups—PTAs, Scout troops, church groups, civic clubs, etc.—to “sell” chairs along the route of the two major Fiesta® parades. Depending on the number of chairs they offer, those groups can raise up to \$600,000 each April.

⁵ San Antonio city ordinance 2008-02-21-0125

⁶ Fiesta® Commission Bylaws

The commission has a full-time staff of seven, some seasonal employees and 200 volunteers who give from 10 to 1,000 hours each year.

Fiesta® Commission staff

Fernando Villarreal	Interim Executive Director
Tim Nakata	Director
Anne Keever Cannon, APR	Controller
Patty Gonzales	Public Relations Manager
Laura Arriaga	Corporate Partners Manager
Linda Skop	Projects Manager
	Creative Coordinator

Seasonal staff

Tina Flatten	Merchandise Manager
Mary Martha Hernandez	Volunteer Coordinator
Bob McConnell	
Pat McConnell	
Alice Kormanik	

Corporate Sponsorships

The Fiesta® San Antonio Commission welcomes corporate sponsorships from both local and national companies. The commission offers a variety of sponsor levels and benefits. One of the most important and effective levels is the “Official” designation. Only the Fiesta Commission can offer that level.

Fiesta® sponsor levels

- Official sponsor
- Media sponsor
- In-kind sponsor
- Underwriter

Examples of available benefits

- Website logo & link
- Fiesta® Program Magazine ad (50,000 copies)
- Public service announcements on the official Fiesta® TV station
- Public service announcements on official Fiesta® radio stations
- Sponsor logo on Fiesta® billboards
- Sponsor name on street banners
- Logo on Fiesta® schedule brochure (270,000 copies)
- Company presence at certain Fiesta® events

The commission prepares followup reports for its major sponsors, giving them detailed data on the reach of their message, number of impressions made and other information.

Additional information is available at <http://www.fiesta-sa.org/get-involved/become-a-sponsor/>.

Many of the almost 100 participating member organizations also seek sponsor support separately from the Fiesta[®] Commission. The commission will help companies contact officials at those nonprofit organizations.

Membership

The Fiesta[®] Commission offers memberships to individuals and businesses that want to show their support for the Alamo City's biggest, best festival. All members receive a 15 percent discount on official merchandise at The Fiesta Store[®]. Other benefits depend on membership levels. The most popular level is Premier because it includes a limited-edition Fiesta[®] medal.

Additional information is available at <http://www.fiesta-sa.org/get-involved/membership-benefits/>.

Volunteering

Fiesta[®] wouldn't be possible without many dedicated volunteers. Some 75,000 residents do everything from leading governing boards to picking up trash.

The Fiesta[®] Commission's award-winning volunteer program⁷ has a base of 200 men and women. Some give their time throughout the year, helping in the office and The Fiesta Store[®], making crafts for the store, and preparing mailings. Others focus their efforts close to or during the celebration itself.

The commission's 100 nonprofit PMOs also rely on volunteers. The commission's volunteer coordinator can help individuals contact organizations regarding volunteer opportunities.

Additional information is available at <http://www.fiesta-sa.org/get-involved/become-a-volunteer/>.

The Fiesta Store[®]

The Fiesta Store[®] is the retail outlet of the Fiesta[®] Commission. It's located at the commission office, 2611 Broadway, and online at <http://fiestastore.fiesta-sa.org/>.

The store offers official Fiesta merchandise including clothing, tote bags, souvenirs, gift cards and the official Fiesta[®] poster. Among the store's most popular offerings are pins and medals produced by many nonprofit Fiesta PMOs.

⁷ Best Volunteer Program, Texas Festivals and Events Association Zenith Awards, July 2010

The Fiesta Store® offers to take its merchandise to local companies for corporate sales. For more information contact Merchandise Manager Tina Flatten at (210) 227-5191.