*The San Antonio Conservation Society*

# JOURNAL

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## Recipe for HemisFair Park: Just Add Water

PHOTO BY MACK DAMON

Bruce MacDougal
Executive Director

A civic center, a theme park, a petting zoo and kiddieland, two new hotels: all of these and more have been proposed for San Antonio's HemisFair Park. At last, the City of San Antonio wants to make up its mind. The first official, City Council sanctioned master plan for HemisFair Park has been approved.

From the day the San Antonio World's Fair closed in 1968, the future of the site of the fair has been under study. Blue ribbon committees and task forces failed and a disjointed, uninviting and deteriorating public space lingered. A jumble of federal, state and local ownership made a common vision impossible; the city had no choice but to take the lead.

Councilman Roger Flores, with the support of the entire City Council, initiated the HemisFair Park master plan, in October 2003. From the beginning, the plan was on an astoundingly fast track. Unlike other master planning efforts for the city parks, the HemisFair Master Plan process relied on an array of city department heads and staff to provide the research and coordinate the input.

Led by Rebecca Waldman, Director of the Department of Asset Management, this collaboration not only hastened the process but also allowed for a dynamic of constant reconciliation of differences of opinion and research of questionable facts. Although this plan might be less visionary, it is firmly grounded in reality—not a bad recipe for a plan that provides a catalyst for change after 36 years of floundering.

Conservation Society representatives participated in the planning from the beginning. The Society's longstanding interests and suggested solutions to challenges were put forth in two stakeholder meetings prior to larger public meetings facilitated by outside professional planning consultants. To take advantage of some of the personal histories of individual members and the collective wisdom of the Society's Board of Directors, President Loretta Huddleston convened a special board meeting following a tour of the controversial areas in the park. The direction given by the Board was clear: retain and reuse all of the 24 historic structures, including two ruins.

*"Although this plan might be less visionary, it is firmly grounded in reality."*

The ruins of the Dugosh and Tynan dependencies present special opportunities for preservation in a manner that will display their historic value. All of these historic pre-Fair structures have value because of their importance as vestiges of the neighborhood destroyed for HemisFair, and as a collection of historic San Antonio showcased in the fair and preserved through the efforts of the Conservation Society.

The Board of Directors also recognized the value of the buildings erected for the Fair. Chief among them is the 1968 Women's Pavilion designed by nationally acclaimed San Antonio architect Cyrus Wagner. The Institute of Texan Cultures currently uses this architectural landmark for storage; its intricate wooden doors created by local craftsman Lynn Ford sit propped in a corner. The Society encouraged the reuse of the building as part of the redevelopment of the park.

Another currently underutilized Fair building, the Gulf Insurance Group Building, should be studied for reuse. Located adjacent to the Woman's Pavilion, south of the water feature, this rectangular two story building housed a visitor information pavilion during the Fair.

The master plan includes many of the suggestions endorsed by the Conservation Society in both the Society's roles as a historic preservation organization and as a protector and promoter of public parks. Initial guiding principles that came out of the first stakeholder workshop included the importance of open space, using family and children's activities as anchors, improving linkages to nearby neighborhoods and improved connections to the Institute of Texan Cultures. Preservation of historic structures was a given at each of the citizen input meetings and seeking financially viable uses for the historic structures was emphasized.

The plan also proposes creating transportation links to other downtown locations and improving circulation within the park as well as providing convenient parking on the edges of the park. An important principle in the plan is the priority of development of the park first for the residents of San Antonio, secondarily for visitors.

With all of these good ideas receiving citizen and city blessing, what is next? Finding the necessary funding and developing the needed public/private and intergovernmental partnerships will be the key to the success of a 21st century HemisFair Park.

# A Message from the President

Loretta Huddleston
President

Lobby Day in Washington D.C. was held on March 10 and was sponsored by Preservation Action. The event was pronounced a success by the organizers and representatives of the Society in attendance —Virginia Nicholas, Loretta Huddleston and Bruce MacDougal. More than 200 preservationists attended the event for networking, workshops and visits to their legislators. Preservation Action was formed in 1974 in the Garden at Casa Villita and is celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2004. There is a decorative tile in the Casa Villita Garden commemorating this event.

By the time you read this, the Historic Preservation Awards Banquet will have already been held at historic Hangar 9 on Brooks City Base. Ten Awards for the Built Environment, six Texas Preservation Hero Awards, the Lynn Ford Craftsman Award and Amanda Cartwright Taylor Award will have been presented to outstanding recipients. In commemoration of the Society's 80th Anniversary, former mayors, our present mayor and county judges were recognized for accomplishments in historic preservation during their term of office. Many thanks to Peggy Penshorn and Azalia Hardy for chairing the 2004 Awards Committee.

Cherise Bell in the Historic Preservation Office of the City of San Antonio is working hard on the Historic Survey of the original 36 square miles of the city. If you are interested in serving as a volunteer with this project, please call the Society office at 224-6163 and Joanna Parrish will return your call. Joanna is serving as the Historic Survey Chairman for the Society and is acting as liaison to the city on this project.

Fiesta is just around the corner and of course "Night in Old San Antonio" Chairman Deborah Sibley and the NIOSA Committee are working very hard to make this the best NIOSA event ever. As always, there will be lots of good food, entertainment and great camaraderie. I would like to thank all of our volunteers for their hard work at NIOSA and those who volunteer their time year round. There are many new items this year—a new area, new booths in Villa Espana, new food items and new entertainment. If you are not already serving as a volunteer at NIOSA, plan to attend and bring your friends and ENJOY. See you at NIOSA!

*Viva Fiesta! Viva NIOSA!*
*Viva Volunteers!*

# Longtime Watermelon Lady Stays on the Job

*By Docia Williams*

Luling may have its queen of the "Watermelon Thump," but NIOSA has its own very special "watermelon queen," Vivian Gaschen, who has been at the helm of the watermelon booth for over a quarter of a century!

Vivian and her late husband, Army Lt. Col. Monroe Gaschen, came to San Antonio in 1960. This was the colonel's last military assignment prior to his retirement. He was the purchasing agent for the Fort Sam Houston Officer's Club.

Vivian joined the Conservation Society shortly after her arrival here, at the insistence of her friend, the late Sue Armitage. At that time, Sue was chairman of the watermelon booth at NIOSA, and she soon enlisted Vivian's help.

The tasty melons were served up in big, generous slices for twenty-five cents apiece. Today's booth, now known as the "Mexican Fruit Market," presents a flavorful "shish kabob" of watermelon and pineapple chunks topped off by a succulent big red strawberry to the tune of $1.50 per serving, five times the price of the 1960s fruit offering!

The Mexican-grown fruit is delivered by the California Fruit Company, and about fifty melons are sliced and sold annually. In the "old days," the booth used about one hundred melons during the annual event. Vivian said the chairman used to do all the buying, but now NIOSA has purchasing agents who do this.

I moved to San Antonio in 1968 when my former husband, Air Force Lt. Col. Stanley Southworth, and I returned from a three year assignment in Madrid, Spain. I joined the Conservation Society the next year at the urging of my close friend, Frances Kallison. After becoming acquainted with Sue and John Armitage and Vivian Gaschen I began volunteering at the watermelon booth along with my husband and then teenage daughter, Sarah.

My late parents, John and Statira Schultz, came to visit us every year from Garland during Fiesta week, and we just naturally dragged them along to NIOSA and the watermelon booth. They too helped to slice and serve the tasty treats and even joined the Society as out of town members.

The Armitages, Vivian Gaschen, and several of their regular helpers, made working at the booth such fun it was considered quite a coup to be able to participate. No one ever seemed to mind being covered with watermelon juice at the end of the evening!

In the late seventies, John and Sue Armitage moved to Colorado, and Vivian inherited the chairmanship of the booth, which she continues to this day. Vivacious Vivian, who admits to being an octogenarian, still works as a travel agent with Fuller Travel. She is a world traveler, having just returned from an extended trip to India, and can run circles around women half her age. She is a dedicated and tireless worker for the Conservation Society.

*Vivian Gaschen has been a fixture at the NIOSA watermelon booth for more than 40 years.*

These days I find I'm too weary after a nine to five day of working as a tour guide to come and work at NIOSA. But, if I were to go back to work as a NIOSA volunteer, you can be sure the first place I'd be headed would be to Vivian Gaschen's fruit stand!

*Docia Williams is the author of several books on local sites that are haunted.*

# Conservation Society Gives Preservation Awards

The San Antonio Conservation Society honored the winners of its Historic Preservation Awards for the Built Environment and presented other special awards at a ceremony on March 30 at the historic Hangar Nine at Brooks City-Base.

Projects in the built environment and craftsmanship were recognized. Jurors were Stephen Fox, architectural historian with the School of Architecture, Rice University; Steve Kline, architect with the General Services Administration in Fort Worth; and Brooke Sween McGloin, AIA, with McGloin + Sween in Corpus Christi.

The 2004 winners are:

- Hirsch-Garrett House, 125 West Ashby Pl., built 1905-1910; owned by David and Alicia Garrett; Architect: Charles Schubert;
- Atascosa County Courthouse, Jourdanton, TX, owned by Atascosa County, Architect: Fisher*Heck Architects;
- Bexar County Courthouse, 100 Dolorosa St.; built 1897; owned by Bexar County; Architect: 3D/International
- Comfort State Bank Building, Comfort, TX, owned by Comfort Heritage Foundation; Architect: Ignacio Salas-Humara;
- Harnisch House, 523 King William Street, built 1884; owned by Stephen & Debra Walker; Architect: Madeline Anz Slay Architecture, PLLC;
- Heiner/Huth House, 335 E. Crockett St., built 1850; owned by Gal-Tex Hotel Corp; Architect: Fisher*Heck Architect;
- San Fernando Cathedral, 115 Main Plaza, owned by the Catholic Archdiocese of San Antonio; Fisher*Heck Architects with Rafferty Rafferty Tollefson;
- San Pedro Springs Park Bandstand and Blockhouse, San Pedro Springs Park, owned by City of San Antonio; Architect: Fisher*Heck Architects;
- Temple Beth-El, 125 W. Ashby Pl., owned by Congregation Temple Beth-El; Architect: Dror Baldinger of Marmon Mok, LLP;
- One award for three projects on Houston St.: Maverick-Giles Building (160 E. Houston St.); Schaum Building (255-233 E. Houston St.); and Vogue Building (301 E. Houston St.), owned by Federal Realty Trust Investment; Architect: 3D/International.

The Society also gave two special awards: The Lynn Ford Craftsman Award to Denise Kocurek for her metal work and wood carving and the Amanda Cartwright Taylor Award to the

(Continued on p. 8)

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The purpose for which the San Antonio Conservation Society was formed is to preserve and encourage the preservation of historic buildings, objects, places and customs relating to the history of Texas, its natural beauty and all that is admirably distinctive to our State; and by such physical and cultural preservation to keep the history of Texas legible and intact to educate the public, especially the youth of today and tomorrow with knowledge of our inherited regional values.

# Anticucho Recipe Development Remembered

*Left: Anticuchos in Cuzco, Peru, with potatoes at the end of the skewers (Photo by Mary Fisher). Above: Anticucho recipe developer Jane Maverick McMillan and her guinea pig daughter, Mary Fisher.*

*By Mary Fisher*

When I was in high school, my mother, Jane Maverick McMillan, was asked to create a new dish for A Night In Old San Antonio. Never having traveled to South America, she knew nothing of the Peruvian specialty she was asked to replicate other than that it was made with beef heart marinated in vinegar, strung on a stick and cooked over a brazier like a shishkebab.

Never one to walk away from a challenge—having graduated from UT Law School when it was virtually an all-male bastion—Mom joined forces with a Society friend, Zelime Dobbins, and set to work. That is where I came in, along with my Dad, the Dobbins kids.....and the neighborhood dogs.

As the women experimented with different marinades and cuts of beef (none of them heart, which they decided was too exotic), we became the tasters. Once, we went to someone's place in the country for an al fresco cookout next to a stock pond. That time, the explosive chile quotient made the anticuchos inedible. On another occasion, excess vinegar rendered the same result. As Mom recalled in a 1988 newspaper interview, "We couldn't eat them, but the neighborhood dogs just loved them."

Eventually the women figured out the right cut of meat—not too tender or it would fall off the stick while cooking, not too tough or it would be no treat. They also hit on the right combinations of comino, oregano, garlic, and chiles, and, more importantly, the right proportion of red wine vinegar to water for the marinade.

Soon thereafter my Aunt Lillian Padgitt and her husband, Jim, moved to town and took over the anticucho booth, which they ran for 25 years. His contribution to the recipe was the idea of swabbing the cooking meat with a sop made from a mix of leftover marinade and bacon grease.

By then a devotee of the dish, I often volunteered in the booth and enjoyed sampling the goods. It was not until my older son married a Peruvian, however, that I had the chance to try the real thing. At a little cafe in Lima I learned that anticuchos are indeed made with beef hearts. But they have large chunks of potato strung onto the end of the skewer. And the flavor is bland with barely a hint of vinegar and virtually no spice.

After sampling them at the source, I felt like my younger son who, raised on San Antonio style Mexican food, had this to say about the food he encountered at Sanborn's in Monterrey at age seven: "Mom," he asked plaintively, "why don't the Mexicans know how to fix their own food?"

*Mary Fisher is a writer and author of "Rosita's Bridge."*

# NIOSA Memories Endure

*By Danny Duke*

I first experienced the extravaganza that is Night In Old San Antonio as a boy, about ten-years-old or so at the time. In old photos, I appear a blue-eyed kid, head almost shaved — according to the style of the day — except for a tuft of hair standing in the front, stiffened by butch wax.

My father, a small town banker, enjoyed showing off his family. He was a man of small stature with a thin moustache, electrifying energy, and a ready smile. He brought us along, my mother, younger sister and I, from our home in deep Northeast Texas to a banker's convention in San Antonio the week of Fiesta. That would have been in the late 1950's.

For three generations my family had lived in a corner of Texas characterized by gently sloping hills, pine trees and red dirt. Public frivolity in our part of the state was the occasional variety show held at a high school auditorium, a farcical production at which our mothers and fathers, dressed in outrageous costumes disguising themselves, thank Heaven, almost beyond recognition.

*Left: Danny Duke visited NIOSA as a boy. Right: Danny Duke remembers NIOSA now.*

To the music of popular tunes of the day, they danced and sang as the appreciative audience laughed and applauded. But on ordinary days on the streets of a small East Texas town, everyone looked pretty much alike. Hispanic culture, or for that matter any other culture except for the Afro-American culture, did not exist there.

Night In Old San Antonio was something else. We walked in a blushing dusk from the Gunter Hotel along the wandering streets of San Antonio to La Villita. Suddenly there it was, a fantastic world, the night ablaze with celebration, revelers dancing to the music of mariachis, under a blanket of stars. The aroma of chilies, garlic and comino, filled the air. I was enchanted.

You do not choose your first home but you can, if you are lucky, pick your last. For a ten-year-old, San Antonio put on her best party dress and danced. And when that boy grew up, he came back to find her.

*Danny Duke is a local opthamologist whose writings appear in the Express-News and other publications.*

## Volunteers needed for publication awards

The San Antonio Conservation Society Publication Awards Committee has issued a call for readers/evaluators for the Publication Awards for 2005.

If you have not already indicated your willingness to be a reader/evaluator and if you are interested in reading and helping us make decisions regarding the awards, please contact Edwinna Janert at 698-1731. May 14 is the deadline for nominations. Materials will be available for review starting Monday, May 24, 2004. The SACS Publication Awards Committee will select the winners by November 2004.

**Visit Our Website at saconservation.org**

# NIOSA INTRODUCES NEW AREAS, FOODS AND MUSIC

## New Froggy Bottom area highlights city's African-American heritage

This year, Plaza Juarez will become Froggy Bottom, NIOSA's newest heritage area. Southern food and fine blues and jazz music will fill the area devoted to the cultural contributions of African-Americans.

The new NIOSA area takes its name from the Froggy Bottom region of Louisiana, from which many of the San Antonio's early Afrrican-American settlers migrated in the mid to late 1800s. The Froggy Bottom name was also meaningful as a popular, local social club on the near East Side of downtown in the early part of the 20th century.

Booth décor takes its cue from the gracious wrought-iron artistry found throughout Louisiana, while the stage set reflects the African-American pioneers in jazz and blues.

Also a variety of southern foods are being introduced, to include: Jambalaya and Corn Bread, Fried Okra, Barbeque Pork Ribs, Bongo-k-Bobs (beef shish-kebobs named in honor of local, musical legend Bongo Joe), Mr. Chicken (skewered, fried chicken), Sweet Potato Pie and Wahooz (a Bicardi, malt beer beverage in several flavors).

This year, musical entertainment will be provided by the Grateful Geezers, an exceptionally talented group of regional performers playing jazz and blues.

Under the leadership of Area Chairman Margaret Winn and Vice Chairman Barbara Lawrence, Froggy Bottom will commemorate the rich contributions African-Americans have made to San Antonio.

## Villa Espana moves to O'Neil Ford Plaza

With its move to the heart of La Villita in 2004, Villa Espana will take on a fresh, new look. Booths adorned with graceful, arched, terra cotta facades, and decorated with hand-stenciled tiles, replicate the warmth and beauty of a Spanish village.

Area Chairman Janet Dietel and the former Tin Pan Alley volunteers are on-board to lead the new Villa Espana.

Zarabande, a four-piece ensemble playing flamenco guitar and Latin jazz, has been added to the entertainment line-up on the newly created Plaza stage. The Little Church stage will continue to feature the Revival Brothers Band.

Along with the sights and sounds of Spain, Villa Espana will feature foods with a Spanish flavor as well, including: Tapas Bandas (chicken taco), Cajeta Crepes, Catfish Catalan, Shrimp Parrilla, Puerco Serrano (pork sandwich), and Cacahuates (hot nuts). When it's time to cool the palate, try the Sangria (fruited wine), Vaca Negra ("Black Cow" ice cream drink), Soft Drinks or Cerveza (beer).

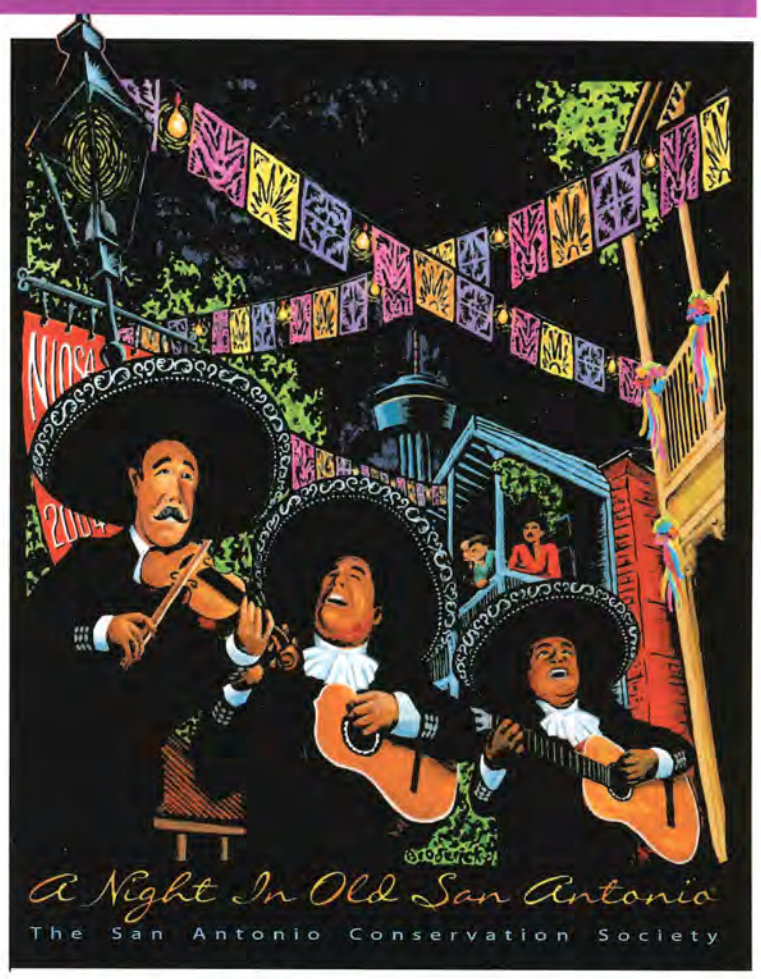
*NIOSA Chairman Deborah Sibley, Vice Chairmen Ernie Beitler, Vivian Demos, Melissa Kazen and DeAnna Keesee unveil the official 2004 NIOSA poster.*

## The Legacy Continues

NIOSA Chairman Deborah Sibley, along with her appointed Vice Chairmen, Ernie Beitler (who also serves as Assistant Treasurer), Vivian Demos, Melissa Kazen and DeAnna Keesee have been at work for almost a year planning this year's event. "With the creative development of two areas, the NIOSA office has been a busy place for months," Sibley said. "Adding Froggy Bottom and redesigning Villa Espana have been thrilling projects for our team. From the historical research conducted in libraries and with community focus groups, to the design concepts, construction and paint finishes, our volunteers and staff have been amazing," Sibley said.

"Nic Yanes, our Warehouse Foreman, has such incredible talent," Sibley added. "He has taken our very rudimentary plans and constructed booth facades and dècor that reproduce the authenticity we were striving to achieve. We are very fortunate to have someone with his skill and vision as part of our team."

The NIOSA crew has also been involved in the facelift for Mission Trail's Fortune Teller booth and two new booths in Clown Alley: Pickles and Balloon Animals.




## Mariachis return to NIOSA

The San Antonio Conservation Society's 2004 winning NIOSA commemorative poster signals the triumphant return of the mariachis to San Antonio's premier Fiesta event.

Titled "Cultural Chorus," artist Mark Broderick's dramatic work not only offers the mariachis as a symbol of San Antonio's rich cultural heritage, but, with its setting in La Villita, the painting also draws attention to the Society's continued involvement in the preservation of La Villita.

This year, NIOSA welcomes Los Caporales, the famed mariachi troupe from Fiesta Texas. They will perform from 5:30-6 p.m. in the South of the Border area and from 6-7 p.m. in the Mexican Market area each night.

Posters may be purchased at any of the on-site Souvenir Booths during NIOSA. Artist Mark Broderick will be signing his work on the porch of Artistic Endeavors Art Gallery in La Villita during the event. Limited Edition, signed and numbered posters sell for $50.00. They come with an official seal and Certificate of Authenticity. Unsigned prints sell for $25.00. Either poster may be ordered on-line at ***www.niosa.org*** or purchased at Sigoloff Frame & Art, 8222 Broadway.

## ENTERTAINMENT SCHEDULE

**Arneson Theater: Tu/Wed.**
5:30-10:30 Mo-Dels

**Arneson Theater: Th/Fr**
5:30-10:30 Millennium

**French Quarter: Nightly**
Main Stage Regency Jazz
PP Stage 3-Stepz

**Froggy Bottom: Nightly**
5:30-10:30 Grateful Geezers

**Frontier Town: Nightly**
5:30-10:30 Bobby Baker & the Longnecks

**Haymarket: Nightly**
5:30-10:30 Bene Medina

**Internat'l Walkway: Nightly**
5:30-7:30 Lonesome Louie
7:30-10:30 Emuzuki

**Irish Flat: Nightly**
5:30-10:30 Campbell & Wilson

**Main Street: Tu-Fr**
5:30-10:30 Robert Delgado

**Main Street Gazebo: Tu-Fr**
5:30-7:00 Variety Bands
7:00-10:30 Whoo-sits

**Mexican Market: Nightly**
5:30-6:00 Folklorico Dancers
6:00-7:00 Los Caporales
7:00-10:30 Sabas Trio

**Mission Trail: Tu-Th**
5:30-10:30 Texas Top-Hands

**Mission Trail: Fr**
5:30-10:30 Geronimo Trevino

**Sauerkraut Bend: Nightly**
5:30-10:30 Jubilee Polka Band
6:30/8:00 Cadence Cloggers

**South of the Border: Nightly**
5:30-6:00 Los Caporales

**Villa Espana: Nightly**
Main Stage Revival Brothers
Plaza Stage Zarabande

# NIOSA Traces Its Roots to Spain

*By Lewis F. Fisher*

Like the City of San Antonio, A Night In Old San Antonio can trace its roots to Spain.

The San Antonio Conservation Society was 12 years old when it could celebrate completion of one of its first goals, the rescue and restoration of Mission San Jose. If ever the society had an excuse for a party, this was it. The granary was restored, the mission church had four walls and a roof again and tourists could no longer drive up to the Rose Window on the county road that had run through the one-time mission plaza, once more enclosed by fortified walls with rooms for Indian converts.

So it was that on the Sunday evening of June 14, 1936, Conservation Society members, husbands and a host of local government officials gathered in the newly-named Fiesta Plaza beside the mission church for –what else? – a Mexican supper. The gala event was officially designated A Night in Spain. Like the present A Night In Old San Antonio, A Night in Spain yielded a profit for historic preservation: $167.90. You have to start somewhere.

Then the shift in nomenclature from nighttime Spain to nighttime San Antonio took a detour. Based on the success of A Night in Spain, five months later the society's ladies threw another fiesta, this one, also at San Jose, dubbed an Indian Harvest Festival. Held the Sunday evening before Thanksgiving, this was to feature Indian dances and be a sort of Southwestern counterpart to the Pilgrim Thanksgiving.

By the next November, the Indian Harvest Festival gained a costumed chorus, Spanish dancers and orchestra selections. But a norther also blew in, with rain, sleet and hail, and hardly anyone came. In 1938 the Harvest Festival was held in October.

In October 1940 the event moved to the newly beautified banks of the San Antonio River as a River Jubilee. The next year it was a River Festival.

Attendance exceeded 1,000 for the first time in 1942 when it was called a River Carnival. The Carnival was not repeated in 1943 because of wartime, but when it came back in October 1944 it was a Festival again, as it was termed in 1946, having skipped 1945 due to the Texas Statehood Centennial.

In 1946 the society gave up on the uncertain fall weather and tied the River Festival to Fiesta Week in April. The growing assortment of concession stands and entertainment sections were moved the next year up from the riverbanks to the more manageable open areas of La Villita.

Someone in 1948 referred to Fiesta at La Villita as more of "A Night In Old San Antonio." The press picked up on the new name, and the next year it was unanimously A Night In Old San Antonio – in La Villita, and generating funds for historic preservation. All of which it still does, 68 years from its roots in nighttime Spain.

*In addition to several other books about San Antonio, Lewis F. Fisher is the author of Saving San Antonio: The Precarious Preservation of a Heritage.*

*Night in Old San Antonio - A Picture-Taking Session at San Jose Mission, April 1950. "The Tienda"*

*Posters representing Spanish fiestas will bring the culture and color of Spain to life in Villa Espana.*

## NEW MEMBERS

Mrs. Linda Alwine
Mr. Richard Alwine
Mrs. Candace Baird
Mrs. Joni L. Harding-Belk
Ms. Ollie S. Bryant
Mrs. Margaret Carpenter
Ms. Joan Childress
Mr. Timothy B. Cone, AIA
Mr. Malcolm A. Ferris
Mr. Frank Fertitta
Mrs. Melissa Kay Fertitta
Mr. David Flores
Ms. Andrea Frankland
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Mrs. Michelle Marie Herrera
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Ms. Melody Krumdieck
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Mr. Carl Story
Mrs. Tara Margin Sutton
Mrs. Dodie Tunches
Mrs. Michelle Vega
Mr. Walt Vega
Dr. Mikel Westwood
Ms. Sarah Elizabeth Williamson
Mr Gerald Wright

## Library Update

*By Beth Standifird*

### *What's New*

The library has processed 36 sets of architectural drawings by Atlee B. and Robert M. Ayres, donated to the Society by local architect Paul Kinnison. The drawings include concept floor plans on better paper for residences in Texas and Oklahoma. These drawings are part of a collection of over 400 documents that primarily depict local structures. Other architects whose works are represented in the library's collection include: Ralph Cameron, Bartlett Cocke, Ford, Powel & Carson, Alfred Giles, J. Reiley Gordon, Robert H.H. Hugman, and George Willis.

### *Did You Know?*

In the early 1950s, NIOSA featured its own mascot, Chulito, a live burro. Several famous NIOSA firsts happened during this decade, including the introduction of anticuchos in 1955 and the extension of the event to two nights in 1954, then to three nights in 1957, and finally to four nights in 1958.

*Beth Standifird is the San Antonio Conservation Society librarian.*

*Ad for Fiesta 1959 features a Night in Old San Antonio.*

# SETTING IS EVERYTHING

**Rick Riordan is an award-winning mystery writer whose books are set in San Antonio - here he shares his thoughts on his hometown as a literary venue**

Ten years ago, when I started writing my Tres Navarre mystery series, my most important priority was getting San Antonio right.

Living in San Francisco, I was desperately homesick for South Texas. I wanted to do justice to the unique flavor of my hometown. I wanted my gumshoe to haunt the places that were quintessentially San Antonian – the crumbling buildings, the hidden niches, the lesser known historical spots that set the town apart from Anywhere, U.S.A.

Who wants to read a riveting murder scene set at McDonald's? Who'd ever describe Wal-Mart as atmospheric? Everywhere I go in San Antonio, I look for the unusual, the unique. Then I preserve those settings for posterity by murdering people there (fictionally, of course). Call it my own special brand of conservation work.

**The cathedral is one year older than George Washington . . .**

For instance, in my forthcoming book, *Southtown* (April 27), Tres Navarre has a major showdown at the Museum of Art on Jones Avenue. I've always loved the building's history as a former beer brewery. Not only is it a beautiful example of urban recycling, but it gives my characters a chance to reflect on how much the city has changed, and to ponder the age-old question of whether art or beer does more for the human soul. (Of course, in San Antonio, one rarely happens without the other.)

On my hit-list of places to include in future novels is Mission San Jose. Historically, San Antonio just doesn't get any richer. Walking the grounds, I meet parishioners whose families have been connected to the mission for over two centuries. How many secrets and feuds could've developed in that time? Fertile ground for a mystery. I look at the rows of worn stone arches, and I imagine a moonlit scene with two desperate gunmen. I visit the *tiendita* and imagine my private eye having cause to interview the old woman who works there amidst the statues of saints and the holographic Jesus portraits.

**I look at the worn stone arches and imagine a moonlit scene with two desperate gunmen.**

I visit the newly renovated San Fernando Cathedral and see little stories everywhere. I am awed not only by the building itself, but by the bicycle *paleta* salesman on the sidewalk outside, the policeman eating his sandwich on the hood of the pickup truck, the anxious security guard who seems to be looking for someone, the small cluster of choir members who seem to be arguing about a hymn. I imagine the prayer behind each lit candle. The cathedral is one year older than George Washington, and yet it is still the scene of so much color and life.

I visit the original Pig Stand on South Presa and imagine a reluctant material witness having lunch there, cornered by Tres Navarre. If the witness tried to run, where would he go? What neighborhoods would he run through?

**If the witness tried to run, where would he go?**

I visit the Pioneer Flour Mill and wonder how hard it would be to gain access to the tower. Where exactly would a body impact if you pushed someone off? Could you have it crash into the tables at the Guenther House cafe? Could it make a splash in the river?

**Where exactly would a body impact if you pushed someone off?**

My mystery writing gives me a twisted perspective, sure. But it has also let me see my native city with a fresh eye. It's not enough to "write what you know," as my English teachers always told me.

You must first *appreciate* what you know. Any place that makes San Antonio unique is worth appreciating, worth exploring, and, most definitely, worth preserving.

Photos and layout by Lyn Belisle

# Writer Josefina Niggli honed her skills in San Antonio

*Left: The Niggli House at 221 King William St. (Photo by Hector Cardenas). Above: Josefina Niggli sent this photo of herself with pets DeeDee and Tuffy to Franz and Ella Stumpf at Christmas 1976. (Photo Courtesy of Bill Fisher.)*

*By William M. Fisher*

Josefina Niggli, one of the most famous writers to whom San Antonio can lay claim, spent only ten years in our city. However, the time Niggli spent here was crucial. For it was here that she found her vocation as a writer and honed the skills that propelled her to international fame as a playwright and novelist.

Josephine Marie Niggli (she later called herself Josefina) was born in 1910 in Monterrey, Mexico, to Goldie Morgan Niggli, a concert violinist from Virginia, and Frederick Ferdinand Niggli, a Texan whose Swiss ancestors immigrated to Medina County soon after the Texas Revolution. At the time of her birth, her father was the manager of a cement factory in the small Mexican town of Sabinas Hidalgo.

The Mexican Revolution broke out the year Niggli was born and had a large impact on her. In later life it served as a material for plays, but in the short term it meant frequent moves for her family. Upon the assassination of Francisco Madero in 1913, her family fled to Texas.

After seven years of itinerant living they returned to Mexico, only to abandon it once more when the Revolution heated up in 1925. In that year her family moved to San Antonio for good and took up residence at 221 King William Street. Niggli's homeschooling had been so effective that she quickly graduated from Main Avenue High School and enrolled in Incarnate Word College.

At Incarnate Word she majored in philosophy and minored in history. But it was the freshman English class that most stimulated her. In her weekly themes, Niggli wrote about the Mexican friends and customs that she missed. These essays were likely therapeutic to the only child who had left her friends behind to come to a new country. Whatever the inspiration behind her themes, their quality attracted the attention of her teacher Dr. R.E. Roehl, who encouraged her to keep writing.

Others offered more forceful encouragement. Sister Mary Clement once locked Niggli in her room until she completed a submission to the Ladies Home Journal College Short Story Contest. She won second place. Niggli's verse also attracted some attention. Her father printed a chapbook of her poems in 1928, which she later printed in an expanded version in her garage on King William. Some of her poems won prizes in the recently-founded Young Pegasus Poetry Contest as well as the National Catholic Colleges Poetry Contest.

But it was the theater that brought Niggli fame. After graduating from Incarnate Word in 1931, she began to study playwriting with Coates Gwynne, director of the San Antonio Little Theater. Under his tutelage, she began to write one-act plays which she produced at the Fort Sam Houston Hospital Barracks to an audience of disabled World War I veterans. Niggli directed fellow youths in rehearsals at her house, then acted as mistress of ceremonies at the Friday night presentations. During this time, Niggli also wrote a weekly radio drama for KTSA.

Niggli left San Antonio in 1935 to study playwriting at the University of North Carolina. She wrote many plays, most of which dealt with Mexican topics. Productions of her plays met with such great success that the university published an anthology of them in 1938. Two plays met with particular success: "Sunday Costs Five Pesos" and "Tooth or Shave." At the time of her death, they were the most frequently performed one-act plays in the United States.

Niggli once said that she could live on the royalties from "Sunday Costs Five Pesos." She met even greater success in 1945 when her first novel, "Mexican Village," became a best seller and received rave reviews from the press, including the New York Times. A follow-up novel, "Step Down, Elder Brother," was a Book-of-the-Month Club selection.

Niggli traveled widely after her graduation from UNC. She pursued her theatrical interests in Mexico, Ireland, and England and even spent a few years in Hollywood as a script writer for MGM. In 1956 she moved to Cullowhee, North Carolina to accept a teaching job in the English and Drama departments of Western Carolina University. She taught there until her retirement in 1975 and continued to live in Cullowhee until her death in 1983.

After leaving San Antonio in 1935, she only returned once for an extended period when, at the end of the Second World War, she spent a year working at Rosengren's Bookstore. However, Niggli maintained many close friends in San Antonio all her life and occasionally returned to visit them. In 1978 she came back to accept the Arts and Letters Award from the Friends of the San Antonio Public Library. In 1983 she returned here to be buried.

*Bill Fisher is a local attorney interested in gathering more information on Josefina Niggli. He can be contacted at 736-4495.*

# Castroville Receives Preserve America Community Designation

*By Albert F. (Boo) Hausser*

Due to the preservation efforts of San Antonio's neighbor, Castroville (population 2,700) became one of the first eight recipients nationwide of Laura Bush's Preserve America Community designation. Preserve America is a White House initiative designed to encourage and support successful attempts to safeguard the nation's cultural and natural heritage. Castroville was the only Texas city recognized at a White House ceremony in January.

Castroville is becoming a role model and case study in small town preservation efforts and is a true success story. With the threat of urban sprawl from San Antonio at their doorstep, the citizens of Castroville came together in 2000 and applied for the Texas Historical Commission's Visionaries in Preservation program.

They were chosen to be one of the first three communities to become a part of the VIP program. After two years of extensive community work, Castroville became an official Visionaries in Preservation Community, creating a five-year preservation plan to map the future of the town with the goal of protecting their cultural and historical identity.

The San Antonio Conservation Society has long been aware of the historic and cultural importance of this early Texas colony, and has encouraged and supported preservation efforts in Castroville by awarding several homes their prestigious Historic Preservation Building Award.

Thanks to SACS support and continuing promotion of preservation initiatives for both buildings and culture by: the Castroville Conservation Society (chaired by SACS member Carole Romano), the Castro Garden Club, the Castro Colonies Heritage Association, the Friends of the Landmark Inn, the Castroville Chamber of Commerce and the St. Louis Men's Society, along with the Castroville City Council, the town has become a model community of what a small Texas town can accomplish when working together for historic preservation for the common good.

The citizens of Castroville are gaining national prominence for their preservation efforts, which they so richly deserve.

*Albert F. "Boo" Hausser is a Castroville homeowner and member of the Texas Historical Commission.*

# Historic Preservation Award Winners

(Continued from p. 2)

Society for the Preservation of Historic Fort Sam Houston.

Kocurek apprenticed and worked with Ford from the 1960s until his death. Many of her projects are restorations of Ford's work. Other works include iron and woodwork at UTSA, Wolff Baseball Stadium and the doors at Windsor Park Church.

The Society for the Preservation of Historic Fort Sam Houston has been on a 20-year mission to preserve, enhance and record the history of the post's more than 900 historic structures and cultural resources.

The Conservation Society also honored Texas Preservation Heroes:

- Florence Alcoser, president of the Government Hill Neighborhood Association, for her 15 years of service preventing the demolition of more homes in that neighborhood and her leadership in having it named a San Antonio historic district in 2001.
- Richard Alles, leader and founder of the San Antonio Tree Coalition, for his many years of dedication to the establishment of a strong tree preservation ordinance, even in the face of frivolous lawsuits that were later dismissed.
- Susan Chandoha, for 16 years as executive director of Los Compadres de San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, the friends group that offers special project fundraising and political advocacy.
- Lila Cockrell and Irby Hightower, co-chairmen of the San Antonio River Oversight Committee, created by City Council in 1998 to provide order to the proposed improvements to the San Antonio River using Bexar County Flood Control tax monies.
- San Antonio Independent School District for rehabilitating nearly 40 historic schools rather than demolishing them. One dates back to 1886 and still functions as a school.
- City mayors and county judges since May 1981: Mayors Henry G. Cisneros, Lila Cockrell, William "Bill" Thornton, Howard W. Peak, Edward D. Garza, Nelson W. Wolff (as both a former mayor and present day Bexar County Judge), and former County Judge Cyndi Krier.

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# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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| **April 20-23** | 57TH Presentation of A Night in Old San Antonio® |
| **May 3-9** | National Historic Preservation Week, Theme: New Frontiers in Preservation |
| **May 8** | Historic Preservation Seminar, Successful Strategies for Renovating Right: Do's and Don'ts in Historic Districts, 9 am – 12 noon, San Antonio Development & Business Services Center, 1901 South Alamo (call 224-6163 for information) |
| **May 26** | General Meeting, 5 pm Refreshments, 5:30 pm General Meeting and Election of Directors, River House |
| **June 23** | General Meeting, 5 pm Refreshments (hosted by Junior Associates), 5:30 pm General Meeting and Installation of Officers, River House |

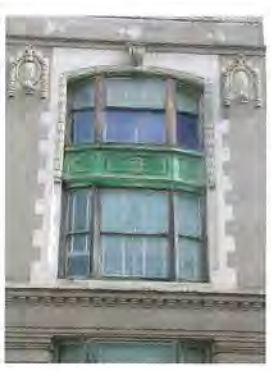
# *NIOSA TICKETS*

Discounted Advance Member Tickets for A Night In Old San Antonio will be available for purchase at the Stuemke Barn beginning April 1, 2004. Purchases may be made weekdays from 1:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. through April 22. The Stuemke Barn is located behind the Society's headquarters at the Wulff House, 107 King William Street.

Advance tickets for adults and children will be available at HEB locations throughout San Antonio, Bulverde and New Braunfels on April 1 as well. Earlybirds can get a jump on purchasing NIOSA tickets by ordering on-line at www.niosa.org. On-line orders are also under way.

# Where Is This?

## *This month*



*Identify its location and mail answer to Marilyn Cates, San Antonio Conservation Society, 107 King William, San Antonio, TX 78204 by April 18, 2004. One name will be drawn to receive four free NIOSA passes. (Photo by Hector Cardenas)*

## *Answer to last issue's Where Is This?*

Answer to the last quiz: The cupola is on top of the Sullivan Carriage House. Designed by Alfred Giles, the limestone carriage house was built on Broadway downtown for the Daniel Sullivan family in 1896. In 1988, it was moved to the San Antonio Botanical Garden, where is serves as the entry point to the garden. It houses a gift shop, restaurant (the original horse stalls are booths). Upstairs are a meeting room and offices. SACS contributed $100,000 of the $325,000 cost to have it moved and reassembled.

The winner of the contest and four free NIOSA passes is Alton Fischer.