



SAN ANTONIO  
EXPRESS-NEWS

S.A. TRICENTENNIAL  
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TRICENTENNIAL  
CALENDAR

#### MONDAY

**Hidden Histories: Urban 15.** 2500 S. Presa, 210-736-1500, urban15.org. This episode of "Hidden Histories" considers the disappearances that continue to haunt both the contemporary urban landscape and our collective memory as a city. 7-8 p.m.

#### WEDNESDAY

**City of San Antonio Fourth of July Celebration: Woodlawn Lake Park.** 1103 Cincinnati Ave., saparksfoundation.org. This year's celebration will feature a family walk/run around the lake, free Zumba sessions, carnival games and rides, face-painters, children's activities, workshops, live music and fireworks. 8 a.m.-9:30 p.m.

#### THURSDAY

**Corazon Cinema on Main Plaza: Main Plaza 195 N. Main Ave., mainplaza.org.** Movie series on the Main Plaza beginning at dusk every Thursday in June, July and August. This week's edition will feature "Wonder." Free. 8:30-10:30 p.m.

#### UPCOMING

**The Story of Laredito: Visual Art Exhibition: Centro Cultural Aztlan.** 1800 Fredericksburg Road, Ste. 103, centroaztlan.org. Artists will interpret the culture and the daily life of the first Barrio in San Antonio, through 6-9 p.m. July 13.

## DOWNTOWN

# MOST IMPORTANT DATE FOR S.A.: APRIL 6, 1968

On that day, HemisFair opened the city to the world

FROM EXPRESS-NEWS ARCHIVES

"The most important date in San Antonio's history isn't the fall of the Alamo or the date we were founded, but April 6, 1968."

Or, the day HemisFair opened. That's banker Tom Frost's assessment of San Antonio's seventh-month World's Fair, which he gave to the Express-News in 2008.

It's hard to argue with Frost's take.

Falling behind Houston and Dallas in terms of population and economy, San Antonio needed a post-World War II jolt.

HemisFair provided that in spades.

The River Walk was finished by Robert H.H. Hugman in 1941, but hadn't come close to its potential. Servicemen were forbidden to go to the River Walk because it was dangerous. Restaurants Casa Rio (1946) and Lung Jui (1956) were the only establishments on the river. But in anticipation of HemisFair, public dollars were spent extending the river east to create the spurlike shape. Business owners, whose buildings mostly faced the street, began readjusting so they had a presence on the river.

A year before the fair was to open, construction mogul H.B. Zachry



UTSA Special Collections

The John H. Wood Federal Courthouse served as the U.S. Pavilion during HemisFair '68.



File photo / San Antonio Express-News

The world's fair drew a million fewer visitors than organizers had hoped for, but it put San Antonio on the path toward a modern tourism industry.

stepped in to build the Hilton Palacio del Rio in 202 days — at the time downtown's first new hotel in more than 20 years. It made national headlines for its modular method of construction, in which the rooms were built off-site, transported over and assembled like Legos. Conrad Hilton even came down to see the feat. HemisFair also spawned the Tower of the Americas, the Convention Center and eponymous arena.

More than 20 countries participated in the fair. Dignitaries such as President Johnson and Princess Grace of Monaco made appearances. It

contained restaurants and international art exhibits — paintings, sculptures and mixed-media — both classical and modern.

On Oct. 6, HemisFair closed. It attracted 6 million visitors over its six-month run — about 1.2 million fewer than what was expected. It also lost \$8.5 million.

And yet HemisFair '68 launched San Antonio's modern tourism industry. It put the city on the map.

*A longer version of this report ran on June 19, 2015. Read it at [ExpressNews.com](http://ExpressNews.com).*