

“Fiesta Flambeau® Parade”

The Fiesta Flambeau® Parade is internationally known as “America’s Largest Illuminated Night Parade”. This spectacular nighttime parade annually attracts more than seven hundred fifty thousand street spectators and continues to grow each year. The parade is considered the premier event of the 11 days of Fiesta® San Antonio.

The idea of this illuminated night parade was the brainchild of Reynolds Andricks who was long time Fiesta® entrepreneur. In 1948 he recommended that a ‘new’ parade take place at night and that it be called Fiesta Flambeau®. Taking the inspiration from the night parades of Mardi Gras in New Orleans he believed, with help, he could create a unique event in San Antonio. He contacted William Petmecky from the Texas hill country of Fredericksburg. Mr. Petmecky was widely recognized as a ‘Festival Impresario’. He became nationally known as a creator of folk festivals and was very delighted when asked to help create Fiesta’s first illuminated night parade.

It was decided that the most effective way to light the parade route was to have torch brigades. Each brigade consisted of four men carrying five-foot poles with lighted flares attached. These flares are similar to those used by police as warning devices at accident scenes. The torch units marched at intervals between each ten parades entry, lighting the evening for all to see. Bands attached flashlights to their instruments and floats lit themselves up in whatever unique fashion the designer created.

Mr. Andricks noticed that the military never participated in Fiesta®. So in order to garner the interest of the military, he visited the Commanding General of Fort Sam Houston and then visited each Air Force Base Commander. He made his proposal more enticing by suggesting that each base elect a Queen, and has her represent the base on their respective parade float. Mr. Andricks assured people that Fiesta had grown large enough to accommodate additional crowned royalty. He also made it clear that he was establishing a new line of nobility that would be known only as Flambeau Royalty which included Miss Fiesta®. The military brass liked his idea and decided to take part. Mr. Andricks moved forward with his plans and the first Flambeau Parade boasted half a dozen military bands and a similar number of floats, each adorned by a Queen. Currently, the military nobility has changed with each base selecting a male and a female representative now known as “Military Ambassadors”.

Mr. Andricks did not want his parade to look like troops marching to war. He wanted a variety of entries and variety of colors. He wanted fun and got it. First the Alzafar Shriners came in with their fez-topped band and a group of their famed trick cyclists. Next, he solicited commercial firms to join – they could afford fancy floats. He convinced them that the visibility of the Flambeau Parade would be good for business. Soon, civil clubs and social clubs became a part of Flambeau. These groups were intrigued by Mr. Andricks’ idea to stage “a parade of nations where Americans who have pride in their heritage, have an opportunity to build a float (emblematic) of their country”. As an alumnus of the University of Texas, he saw to it that the

350-piece University of Texas Longhorn Band led his Flambeau® Parade and that has now become an annual tradition.

The Fiesta Flambeau® Parade changed direction when Reynolds Andricks passed away in 1984. During his illness and after his death, various groups were tasked with the responsibility of sponsoring the parade. The Shriners took on the job in 1983 and then the San Antonio Jaycees tried their hand in 1984. However, the Jaycees decided after the 1987 to give it up to concentrate on their Fiesta event, "La Semana Alegre". In 1988 the Fiesta® San Antonio Commission delegated the Fiesta Flambeau Parade to the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) Council 2. In 1989 the Fiesta Flambeau Parade was staged by a city volunteer group. The following year this same group became known as the Fiesta Flambeau® Parade Association, Inc. Their 1990 parade was rated by the press (and the thousands who watched it) as one of the best yet.

This Association is very committed and dedicated in continuing to make the Flambeau® Parade a unique Fiesta event. In 1996, with the help of the Boy Scouts of America, the Association introduced propane torches to replace the flare-style torches. These propane torches are seen in two other parades in the United States, the St. Paul Winter Carnival and the San Francisco Chinese New Year's Parade. Another tradition established was to have the Fire Fighters Association (as a group) carrying propane torches at the beginning of the parade – one for every year of Flambeau's existence. The firemen have since turned in their torches and now carry the fifty-one state flags of our nation. It was also in 1996 that the Flambeau® parade broke a record of having over half a million street spectators. This record continues year after year.

On the night of April 27, 2013 as the Flambeau® Night Parade streamed down the parade route, severe weather caused parade officials to terminate the remaining parade activities. However, at that time, all the participants were already on the parade route and they safely completed the parade. Numerous parade spectators and television viewers commented that after seeing more than three quarters of the parade prior to the inclement weather, this parade would have been one of the best.

Presently, the Fiesta Flambeau® Parade Association, Inc. consists of eighty three members. There are also at least another two hundred and fifty nonmember volunteers.

FIESTA FLAMBEAU®
PARADE ASSOCIATION, INC.