TAKING THE REINS IN SAN ANTONIO

Becky Kesner

There’s a lot more to see than the Alamo in this unique multicultural city.

Been to San Antonio before? If not, you’re in for a treat. This city is a wonderful mix of Texas and Mexico, new and old, and a great location for NAESP’s 85th annual Convention. Here are some of the things you should know about this unique city and some places you might want to explore.
Remember the Alamo

Everyone remembers the Alamo, a modest structure that looms large in Texas history. Built in 1718 as the mission of San Antonio de Valero, it passed through Spanish and Mexican hands until 1836. In February of that year, a band of about 150 Texans fighting for Texas independence stood off a Mexican army at the Alamo for 13 days. All of the defenders died in battle or were executed. Today the site, minutes away from the Convention Center, is venerated as the Shrine of Texas Liberty, and open to the public.

Stroll the River Walk

If you’d like to get a taste of San Antonio, take a stroll along the city’s famous River Walk, which winds along both sides of the San Antonio River a few steps below street level. Hotels, restaurants, bars, and shops line the umbrella-shaded, cobblestone walkways, and several footbridges let you cross from one side to the other. If you

A Multicultural History

San Antonio traces its history back more than three centuries, when Spanish explorers reached the Indian village of Yanaguana on June 13, 1691—the feast day of Saint Anthony of Padua—and renamed the village and the nearby river San Antonio. In 1718, Father Antonio Olivares established the mission of San Antonio de Valero, which became known as the Alamo, the Spanish name for the surrounding cottonwood trees.

After Mexico won independence from Spain in 1821, San Antonio came under Mexican rule. A revolt by native Tejanos seeking to form an independent state led to the tragic siege of the Alamo. But the subsequent victory at San Jacinto placed San Antonio under the lone star flag of the Republic of Texas until 1845, when Texas became a state.

Since then, San Antonio has prospered as a cultural, industrial, medical, and military center. With a 2002 population of 1,194,222—about 60 percent Hispanic—it is the ninth largest city in the United States.
don’t feel like walking, take a ride on one of the many open tour boats that cruise up and down the river.

**Take a Break**

Been in meeting rooms all day? Want to get outdoors? Try exploring the **San Antonio Missions National Historic Park**. The Alamo was one of five missions established by Franciscan monks along the San Antonio River. All are located on the San Antonio Missions trail, which begins at the Alamo and winds south along a nine-mile stretch of the river.

Or visit **HemisFair Park**, the site of the 1968 World’s Fair. It’s a peaceful retreat in the heart of downtown, with water gardens and playgrounds. In the park you’ll also find the 622-foot Tower of the Americas, offering a spectacular view of the city.

The 33-acre **San Antonio Botanical Garden** offers many different exhibits, including formal displays as well as a variety of native flora. A conservatory

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**How’s the Weather?**

You won’t need to bundle up in San Antonio. Expect daytime temperatures in the mid-70s, dropping into the mid-50s in the evening. You also need not worry too much about April showers. The average precipitation for April is only about two inches, half of what most American cities experience.

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features plants from around the world.

Military buffs may want to visit Fort Sam Houston, a 19th-century military post that was a training site for the storied Buffalo Soldiers, the black cavalrymen who helped pacify the Western frontier. A number of distinguished generals, including John Pershing and Dwight Eisenhower, were based at Fort Sam Houston, which is still in service.

Bring the Kids

If you have children with you, there’s plenty to do as a family. The San Antonio Children’s Museum has a scale model of the city and interactive exhibits that kids can explore, like enclosing themselves in giant soap bubbles or lifting themselves in a kid-powered elevator.

Of course, your kids probably know all about Six Flags Fiesta Texas and Sea World San Antonio, the two sprawling theme parks. In Sea World, “the world’s largest marine life park,” you can see world-famous killer whale Shamu interact with his trainers in a 7 million-gallon tank, or observe dolphins, sharks, penguins, and other sea life cavorting. There’s also the Steel Eel, the Sea World “hypercoaster” that uses its dips and drops to maximize weightless time. Six Flags offers roller coasters, music shows, and a water park.

...come to the Convention not only for your professional learning but for your personal refreshment.

The San Antonio Zoological Gardens and Aquarium has one of the largest animal collections in the United States. Its “Amazonia” exhibit houses more than 30 species of tropical animals and many types of tropical plants, including orchids and bromeliads.

Sample Some Texas Culture

San Antonio reflects a unique blend of Spanish, Mexican, European, and American Indian cultures. The Institute of Texan Cultures, a short walk from the Convention Center, showcases letters, photographs, and other historical items from the many different ethnic groups in Texas. The nearby Instituto de Mexicano, funded by the Mexican government, celebrates the customs and languages of that nation in exhibits, concerts, and lectures.

For art lovers, the San Antonio Museum of Art has exhibits ranging from early Egyptian to modern American art, including the most comprehensive collection of Latin American art in the United States. The Witte Museum has fascinating natural history exhibits and the Gallery of the Southwest specializes in classic Native American jewelry. If you’d like something a little more contemporary, the Nueva Street Gallery specializes in original work by Texas artists.

Shopping Can Be Fun

San Antonio has several unique shopping districts. At El Mercado, more than 100 vendors offer a variety of beautifully crafted Mexican clothing and handiwork. Across the street, the Farmer’s Market offers more traditional goods. Visit La Villita, a square block of restored houses just off the River Walk that has restaurants, art galleries, and shops where you can watch resident artisans at work.

Whatever you like to do, San Antonio has it and we have only scratched the surface here. So come to the Convention not only for your professional learning but for your personal refreshment. You’ll be glad you did.

Becky Kesner is managing editor of Principal. Her e-mail address is bkesner@naesp.org.
Reading Recovery Salutes Effective Principal Leadership and Strong Results

Anthony Sitko, Principal
Ralph J. Bunche Community School
Flint, MI

“The question is, how much are you willing to invest in the people who teach your children daily? Our recent staff turnover has been greater than 50%, but we now have six trained Reading Recovery teachers who are available for literacy instruction beyond the individual tutoring of first-graders. This makes a tremendous difference in results for students.”

Bunche Elementary serves an urban community with a steady loss of both manufacturing jobs and students over the past 20 years. About 90% of its predominantly African-American student population receives free or reduced price lunch. In the last 3 years, their fourth-grade proficiency scores have shot up from 31% to 87%. Reading Recovery has been part of Bunche’s comprehensive literacy program for 5 years, and a major professional development component enhancing the effectiveness of the primary teachers.

Barbara Kulpinsky, Principal
Highlands Elementary School
Sugar Land, TX

“Most kids do well with Reading Recovery, but when they don’t, we know it’s not a lack of teaching or parental involvement. We know exactly what is going on with each child. Reading Recovery is an early identification tool, a way to diagnose a child’s needs and strengths. It’s been a major factor in our success.”

Highlands Elementary, a 700-student school, draws from the surrounding multicultural community which is 45% of Asian descent, some Hispanic and African-American, and about 40% Anglo. Reading Recovery was introduced in the school about 7 years ago. Standardized test scores remain very high, with increased numbers of students ranked as “commendable.”

Russ Claus, Principal
Darmstadt Elementary School
Darmstadt, Germany

“Our focus is on identifying the specific strategies we need to use to help our kids succeed. It’s something we learned from Reading Recovery. When we did that, the test scores went up by themselves — the scores are a by-product, not the focus. Also, our teachers are statistically savvy. We track each kid and use the data to make comparisons quarter-to-quarter.”

Darmstadt Elementary, a Department of Defense Dependents School of 500 students, serves the children of military personnel. Approximately 40% to 50% of the parents are deployed to Iraq and other locations. About two-thirds of the students receive free and reduced price lunch. Dr. Claus has promoted the use of Reading Recovery-based strategies school-wide. In the 5 years that Darmstadt has used this schoolwide approach, DES has gone from being a lower-performing school to one of the highest-performing in the system.

Bob Villarreal, Principal
Eastridge Community Elementary School
Aurora, CO

“Reading Recovery teachers are effective teachers for all kids. Our Reading Recovery teachers are also the language arts teachers, so every student receives the benefits of their knowledge. Having a Reading Recovery trained teacher in the classroom is like having a reading specialist who is teaching all 26 kids.”

Eastridge Elementary is an ethnic and economic melting pot located in Colorado’s second-most affluent district. Sixty percent of its 710 students are persons of color, 47% receive free and reduced price lunch, and 42 different languages are spoken. Reading Recovery was first implemented in the school 7 years ago.

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For more information on these and other outstanding principals, see www.readingrecovery.org/implementation/principalprofiles.asp

About Reading Recovery: Implemented in 8,000 elementary schools, Reading Recovery is a research-based early literacy intervention for lowest-performing first-graders. Students work one-to-one with a highly-trained Reading Recovery teacher in 30-minute daily lessons. In just 12 to 20 weeks, 8 of 10 students reach grade level standard. With good classroom instruction, most former Reading Recovery students make continued progress with their classmates. Reading Recovery is a not-for-profit partnership between universities and schools. To learn more, please e-mail your contact information to contactme@readingrecovery.org.

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