

A Brief History of the U. S. Military Veterans Parade Association

The thought of organizing a Veterans Day Parade first surfaced in the minds of several veterans actively involved with the American GI Forum of San Antonio. They envisioned a parade in the “Heart of Military City, USA” comprised of veterans and community united to honor all military veterans in the month of November.

In soliciting participation and support, the name of Delia A. Guajardo was mentioned by the group. They felt that she would be in a great position to help because of her involvement with the Fiesta Flambeau Association., Market Square Commission, and a Time Warner Cable Television program named “SA Community Pride.”

On May 8, 2000 Carlos Cavazos and Raul Solis met with Mrs. Guajardo, the producer and host of “SA Community Pride,” to discuss the possibility of exposing this idea through her television program. She agreed to meet with them to discuss the plan. Two days later, on May 10, 2000, veterans Richard Rocco, Benito Guerrero, Louie Tamez, Gilbert Romero, Rudy Perez, Carlos Cavazos, Joe Villarreal, and Raul Solis met with Delia Guajardo and Gloria Acosta at Mi Tierra Restaurant.

Delia A. Guajardo agreed to tape and air a program explaining the plan and on May 15, 2000, Richard Rocco, Gilbert Romero, Carlos Cavazos, Antonio Bustamante, and Raul Solis appeared on her show. The plan was overwhelmingly accepted by veterans and community members and on May 25, 2000 the Association’s first meeting was held at the San Antonio office of the National Association of Letter Carriers Union Hall.

Participating members of the initial steering committee were Delia A. Guajardo (appointed chair), Gloria Acosta, Raul Solis, Joe Villarreal, Antonio Bustamante, Fred Carmona, Sylvia Enriquez, Ruben Gutierrez, Tomas Jimenez, and Robert Willis.

On August 7, 2000 the newly formed U.S. Military Veterans Parade Association met at VFW Post 76 and adopted the logo designed by San Antonio artist Joe R. Villarreal. On August 28, 2000 Tomas Jimenez and Delia A. Guajardo reported that the name of the association had been recorded with the County Court at the Bexar County Courthouse. The U.S. Military Veterans Parade Association was now ready for its first parade with two month to prepare.

On **November 18, 2000** under cold and rainy skies, a small group of veterans and community members, assisted by the Lackland Air Force Base Drum and Bugle Corps, marched from Avenue E to Milam Park via Houston Street. The first annual parade Grand Marshall was Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Louis Richard Rocco.

On February 20, 2001, the group met at the American GI Forum Hall and adopted the theme “Veterans and Community United.”

Since the word “Veterans” is protected by state statute, on July 16, 2001 VFW District 20 commander Joe Diaz submitted a letter to HQS, VFW, Department of Texas requesting that permission be granted for the use of the word “Veterans” in the name of the U.S. Military Veterans Parade Association. The VFW, Department of Texas granted permission on July 18, 2001.

The second annual Veterans Day Parade was held on **November 10, 2001** with Major General Alfred Valenzuela as Parade Grand Marshall.

On July 3, 2002 with the help of city council member David Carpenter, the U.S. Military Veterans Parade Association became a 501(c) 3 tax-exempt organization on September 5, 2002.

A letter was prepared and submitted by Joe Diaz on August 8, 2002 to the Texas State Comptrollers Office requesting that the U.S. Military Veterans Parade Association be issued articles of incorporation. The request was approved and principal agents designated on the articles of incorporation were Delia A. Guajardo, Joe Diaz, Fred Carmona, Tomas Jimenez, and Sylvia Sanchez.

The third Veterans Day Parade was held on **November 9, 2002**. The Grand Marshals were senior officers from the military branches: Brigadier General David Stringer, U.S. Air Force; Lieutenant General Freddy McFarren, U.S. Army; Captain Adolfo Ramirez, U.S. Coast Guard; Lieutenant Colonel Richard Rayfield, U.S. Marine Corps; and Captain James Seagle, U.S. Navy.

During the summer of 2003, Delia A. Guajardo, appointed association president, created a committee to draft Association by-laws. Committee members were Sylvia Sanchez, Henry I. Gonzales, Robert De la Vega, Fred Carmona, Howard Ray, and Joe Diaz, chairman. The Association approved the final draft on August 19, 2003.

On **November 8, 2003** the fourth Veterans Day Parade was held with San Antonio Postmaster Robert Larios serving as Grand Marshal. There was a formation fly-by of several military aircraft from east to west over the parade route as well as a special ceremony in Alamo Plaza before the parade.

Lieutenant General Ricardo S. Sanchez served as Grand Marshal for the sixth Veterans Day Parade held on **November 5, 2005**. The day began with a one-hour ceremony in Alamo Plaza followed by the parade and San Antonio’s First Annual Freedom Festival at Milam Park.

November 11, 2006 marked the seventh annual Veterans Day Parade. Again, SGM (Retired) Benito Guerrero led a special ceremony in front of Alamo Plaza prior to the start of the parade to honor fallen veterans. This year also marked the first time the Association distributed Veterans Day Parade Programs to the audience along the parade route. The Grand Marshals of the parade were Admiral John B. Natham, U.S. Navy; Lieutenant General Dennis R. Larsen, U.S. Air Force; Brigadier General P.K. Keen, U.S.

Army; and Lieutenant Colonel Marc L. Magram, U.S. Marine Corps. Tino Duran served as Honorary Grand Marshal. The second annual Freedom Festival was held at Milam Park following the parade.

The eighth annual Veterans Day Parade was held on **November 10, 2007**. The Grand Marshals of the parade were Major General Irving L. Halter, Jr., U.S. Air Force; Brigadier General Manuel Ortiz, U.S. Army; Rear Admiral John W. Goodwin, U.S. Navy; and Colonel Marc L. Magram, U.S. Marine Corps.

9th Annual Veterans Day Parade: Veteran and local San Antonio artist **Jesse Trevino** served as the Grand Marshal on **November 8, 2008**. After graduating from Fox Tech High School, he moved to New York to learn painting under the tutelage of William Draper in New York City. However, his training was cut short when Mr. Trevino was drafted into the Army and sent to Vietnam. After losing his right hand, his painting hand, to sniper fire, Mr. Trevino returned to San Antonio and relearned how to paint. He persevered and earned his international reputation painting the people and landmarks of San Antonio's West Side. The armed services Honorary Grand Marshals for 2008 were **Major General Russell J. Czerw**, Commander, US Army Medical Department Center and School and Fort Sam Houston; **Maj. Gen. K. C. McClain**, Commander, Air Force Personnel Center, Randolph Air Force Base; **Rear Admiral Patrick E. McGrath**, Vice Commander, Naval Air Forces, Commander, Naval Air Forces Reserve Deputy Commander, Navy Region Southwest; and **Lt. Col Marshal Denney III**, U.S. Marines, Deputy Director of the Joint Electronic Warfare Center (JEWEC), San Antonio, Texas.