

Fiesta de Amistad

Each October, Del Rio and its sister city--Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila—celebrate friendship and cooperation between the U.S. and Mexico.

The two cities began celebrating bilateral rapport during an annual Good Neighbor Day beginning in the mid-1950s. During the 1960s, a series of meetings by American and Mexican presidents turned Good Neighbor Day into today's Fiesta de Amistad.

In October 1959 at Camp David, Presidents Eisenhower and López Mateos discussed a proposed joint-venture dam on the Rio Grande, tentatively named Diablo Dam, after the Devils River. Eisenhower felt the name sounded ominous, so President López suggested the Spanish word for friendship, *amistad*.

In 1960 the two leaders met in Acuña on United Nations Day (October 24) to announce the construction of Amistad Dam. To honor that event, Del Rio and Acuña agreed the next year to give Good Neighbor Day a new name--Fiesta de Amistad.

American and Mexican presidents met twice more at Amistad Dam. In 1966 Presidents Johnson and Diaz Ordaz inspected the ongoing construction, and in 1969 Presidents Nixon and Diaz Ordaz dedicated the structure.

Fiesta de Amistad's annual *Abrazo* (Embrace) event is held the weekend nearest United Nations Day to commemorate the 1960 meeting and to celebrate all the presidential meetings, as well as convivial cross-border relations.

Officials and citizens of both cities gather (October 22 at 4 p.m.) in the middle of Amistad Dam. After band performances, lively folklorico dancing, and serious speeches, the celebration gets touchy-feely. Counterparts of both cities—from national and state representatives and mayors down to city department heads—give each other big hugs

beneath two massive bronze eagle statues that mark the international boundary. The eagle is the symbol of both nations.

Fiesta de Amistad also incorporates a longtime pageant tradition which began in 1934. Each year, Acuña crowns a city queen, as does Del Rio (Miss Del Rio Pageant, October 14 at 7 p.m. in Paul Poag Theatre, 746 S. Main St.). The two queens ride together in the Fiesta de Amistad International Parade (October 23 at 10 a.m.). The parade features floats and bands that wind through Del Rio from Ogden to Nicholson Streets. Part of the parade then continues three more miles, past the border, into Acuña. Locals claim it's the only parade in the world that starts in one country and ends in another.

Other events include a rodeo at the Val Verde Fairgrounds (October 22-23, N. Main St. at Western Dr.) and an arts and crafts fair (October 23-24 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. at Greenwood Park, 200 block of Garfield St.).

For complete details and area information, contact the **Del Rio Chamber of Commerce**, 1915 Veterans Blvd., Del Rio 78840 (806/775-3551; www.drchamber.com). The chamber also provides information on visiting Ciudad Acuña.

--Randy Mallory

RESOURCES:

•Susan Leonard—Del Rio Chamber—830-775-3551; susan@drchamber.com

•RE: naming of reservoir:

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/site/docs/pppus.php?admin=037&year=1969&id=354>

•RE: abrazo history

<http://www.usembassy-mexico.gov/meetpres.pdf>

