La Fiesta Pequeña

The La Fiesta Pequeña or Little Fiesta is actually a Big Fiesta when it comes to Santa Barbara’s celebrations of its Spanish and Mexican heritage. It’s the official kick-off party attended by hundreds and filling the lawn in front of the Santa Barbara Mission with blankets and chairs and coolers. When the clock strikes 8 pm, the Mission bells ring out, and it’s time to turn the Mission steps into a stage and the dancing begins.

More than 125 Flower Girls passed out flowers and lined the stage to yell “Viva la Fiesta!” Father Larry and Beth Farnsworth welcomed the fiesteros. After Brother Regan gave the blessing and added, “It’s good to see so many people in my front lawn,” the doors opened and our beautiful Spirit of Fiesta Alexis Simentales appeared in stunning white. She and the Jr. Spirit Sarah Naretto had made a grand entrance earlier in a white convertible to match their dresses.

El Presidente J. C. Gordon came on stage with his family and mayor Helene Schneider. She reminded us, “Our sister city of Toba, Japan, has made it a tradition to visit for Fiesta.” J.C. told the audience that his coastal and ocean theme this year is because our history over the centuries is so linked to the sea.

The dances were ever so varied from flamenco, to Mexican folk, to ballet. Who could forget our own tenor Eduardo Villa singing my favorite Granada (pomegranate in English)? I’ll stick to Spanish. The lighting on the front of the Mission is stunning, changing colors to complement the costumes. The finale had all the dozens of entertainers taking a last bow and filling the Mission steps to say “good night” or Viva la Fiesta!

Fiesta with Fiery Flair

The Santa Barbara Courthouse Legacy Foundation (CLF) began its annual Fiesta party seven years ago with 40 attendees. This year, it was sold-out with 175 costumed folks gathering in the Mural Room and adjoining balcony on the night of Las Noches de Ronda in the Sunken Garden.

You could view the show from above, or there was VIP seating on the stage itself.

Event chair Isabella Madarang made sure there were plenty of margaritas shaken up by Ivo the juggling bartender and Mexican tapas.
ing a variety of tacos. There were a stellar two tables overflowing with desserts for those with a sweet tooth.

El Presidente J.C. Gordon IV (he told me he hadn’t seen his name that way) thanked the CLF for preserving the Courthouse. Parade grand marshal Jean-Michel Cousteau because of the ocean theme this year, spoke about our connection to the sea down through the ages. His life-long passion has been dedicated to the oceans. Others enjoying the fiesta festivities were Carolyn Chandler, Steve Thompson, Julie Ann Brown, and John and Tracie Goordan.

Our courthouse has been around for 80-plus years and has to be the most picturesque courthouse in all of America. Each year, visitors come from all over the world to view this historic architectural masterpiece. Then there are thousands who use it for weddings, concerts, and parties.

The CLF are stewards to ensure the Courthouse will be here for our kids and theirs. Among CLF’s achievements to date is the recasting of the crumbling Spirit of the Ocean sculpture at the entrance. Also, the Great Arch heraldic ceiling was repainted in 2010. The clockwork in the tower was not operating and was restored in 2012. The paintings in the Mural Room were cracked and peeling away from the walls. It was fully restored in 2015, including lighting the ceiling for the first time. Their next project for 2016 is restoring the Great Archway.

Since 2004, almost $2 million has been raised for these projects. Without our local philanthropists, the Courthouse would be crumbling. There are no funds in the regular budget for restorations. The CLF mission is to fund conservation, preservation, and education projects. If you join the Membership Circle, you become part of the Legacy. Call (805) 770-7222.

**Sundowner**

It was time to get out the safari clothes but instead of a long flight to Africa, it was only a short ride to the Riviera to the home of Peggy Wiley and Wilson Quarre for a sundowner. When we arrived, there were two life-sized giraffes and several zebras lurking, but they didn’t move. The occasion was to celebrate our hosts’ 65th birthdays, within 15 days of each other. Peggy’s oldest.

Many of the 175 guests had been on safari. Three of my favorite trips were to Africa: Kenya, Tanzania, Botswana, and South Africa’s Kruger National Park. Sundowners were always a favorite – a late-afternoon ride with your guide to the outback, taking photos then having a happy hour at sundown.

Our hosts’ birthday cake was a masterpiece with the top layer covered in leopard spots icing, and the bottom layer in black-and-white zebra stripes. Happy birthdays, Peggy and Wilson, and thanks for the mini safari in Santa Barbara.

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