



Belton parade to celebrate 100 years of patriotism

BY PATRICIA BENOIT
FME NEWS SERVICE

This year's Belton July Fourth parade and related festivities are a hundred years in the making. The celebration this Thursday marks a century of Belton's patriotic pomp and pageantry.

In 2008, USA Today named Belton's Independence Day parade as one of the nation's "Top Ten Places to Fly Your Flag

BACKROADS on the Fourth." No wonder. For a brief moment, we're all slack-jawed at those hearty souls who brave the sweltering sun and the sore feet — all under the raptappy-boom of drums.

Belton's Fourth of July parade kicks off at 10 a.m. A panorama of decorated bikes, trikes, tractors, trucks and horses will march through city streets.

The first parade began in 1919, an auspicious time. Post-war optimism in 1919 spread over Bell County like a comfortable blanket. Fighting in the Great War ended in November 1918; the worldwide influenza epidemic abated by February 1919. Soldiers were returning home from Europe. Life was getting back to normal, whatever that new normal would be.

The parade, which today has been become a statewide institution, was tacked on to Belton's already full slate of Independence Day celebrations a hundred years ago. Like all the years before, Belton always celebrated the Fourth in raucous style with street fairs, speeches by dignitaries, entertainment and generally



Bunting festoons a float in an unmarked Belton Fourth of July parade as it rolls north on Main Street in front of the former Carnegie Public Library, now part of the Bell County Museum. Thursday's celebration marks a century of Belton's patriotic pomp and pageantry.

COURTESY OF TEXAS
HISTORICAL COMMISSION

happy times. It was only fitting that Belton's July Fourth 1919 become a special day to honor its returning war heroes and remember those who would not return. Back in 1919, the Belton American Legion Post took charge of the annual veteran conventions held in conjunction with the festivities. Special guests were the few remaining veterans of the War Between the States along with veterans of the Spanish-American War and World War I.

Legionnaires set up registration booths and requested that veterans of all wars sign up, listing their full names, ranks at discharge, number of battles and any wounds. Veterans were urged to attend the parade in uniform to march in formation. Bell County still had a few veterans of the Republic of Texas, Civil War and Spanish-American War in its midst. Bunting and flags — store-bought

and homemade — festooned buildings, carriages and automobiles. The Temple Daily Telegram loaned a large number of U.S. flags to the city that were erected at Confederate Park. The first Belton celebration also included a pie-eating contest for the children (grand prize was \$5).

In 1920, a swimming contest and boxing matches were added to a full schedule of activities. The city flooded Nolan Creek to create a lake for the swimming contest, while other celebrants enjoyed cool dips in the downtown Natatorium.

As was the custom, the Belton High School band furnished the music. Forty members of the National Guard 143rd Infantry led the color guard. Six automobiles, two decorated fire trucks and dozens of mounted horsemen rode by. "Snell," the dancing horse, was a crowd favorite. The Farm Bureau drove a truck

bearing two bales of cotton. Eight Klansman from the local Ku Klux Klan rode a float, accompanied by four Klansmen on horseback.

Throughout the decade, the veterans' reunions grew, as did the parade and other related activities. The rodeo became an official part of the Belton Area Chamber of Commerce's celebration in 1924. In the early 1930s, the rodeo joined the Cowboys Turtle Association (now the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association).

The Belton celebrations continued through World War II, with Camp Hood's participation growing as prominent and proud additions. By 1945, with military victories in Europe and Asia, Belton's July Fourth was a homecoming for its hometown hero, Maj. Gen. Walton Harris Walker (1889-1950), who as commander of the IV Armored Corps and XX Corps, was given special commendations for his leadership in the European theatre. Walker did not rest on his laurels.

In 1948, he was made commanding general of the U.S. Eighth Army in Japan. With the Communist invasion of South Korea in 1950, Walker was directed to stop the invasion.

Another fixture in the 1950s Belton parade was Fred Guffy (1900-1985), riding a 1907 Hupmobile. The crowds also cheered the presence of Old Rufus, a 39-year-old horse who pranced down the city streets each year until his demise.

Another joyful addition was the "wagon train" of cars pulled by Dr. William Bowman Long (1921-2010).

Area events and closings for the upcoming Fourth of July celebration

HERALD STAFF REPORT

Patriotic Central Texans are getting ready to celebrate Independence Day with numerous events around the region, but all city offices will be closed Thursday and garbage collection will be disrupted for some customers. Here is a look at Fourth of July events and closings in the area:

FORT HOOD

The Fort Hood Fourth of July Spectacular likely will live up to its name this year with live music, food and beverage vendors, family fun and, to top it all off, 30 minutes of fireworks. The fun starts at 4 p.m. at Fort Hood Stadium and lasts into the evening with The Band Steele, Andy Grammer and the 1st Cavalry Division Band playing. Fireworks begin at 9:30 p.m.

Members of the general public in privately owned vehicles must enter and exit the event through the left visitors' lane of the Clear Creek Gate or obtain a pass from the Marvin Leath Visitors Center. Drivers and passengers 18 and older must have a valid photo ID. A priority parking area will be open to all DoD card holders as well as a general public parking area open to all. Both parking sites will be at the stadium and will be first come, first served. For more information, visit www.home.army.mil/hood or call 254-287-9909.

COPPERAS COVE

The Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8577 and Auxiliary will host the Annual Bell Ringing, beginning with a ceremony at 11 a.m. July 4 at 1506 Veterans Ave., Copperas Cove. The event is open to the public. For more information, contact VFW Post 8577 Jr. Vice Commander Lisa Hunter at 512-277-0034.

Robertson Avenue Baptist Church will host their annual Picnic on the Grounds event from noon to 4 p.m. July 4 at 305 East Robertson Avenue. There will be food, games, a bounce house and the second annual chili cook-off. This event is free and open to the public. For more information, contact 254-368-2530.

TEMPLE

Folks can bring their red, white and blue gear to Miller Park in Temple for All American Fourth of July Fun Fest, sponsored by H-E-B. Celebrations start at 4 p.m. for food, entertainment and fireworks at 9:30 p.m. Bring your lawn chairs and blankets and get ready for free entertainment. Fireworks will be visible along North Third Street, at the Mayborn Center, and in nearby neighborhoods. For more information, visit the City of Temple website at www.templetx.gov.

BELTON

Many people in Central Texas cel-

brate American independence with an old-fashioned rodeo and parade during a three-day affair from July 4-6 at the Bell County Expo Center. People can take in the sights of cowboys riding broncs and bulls. General admission is \$14 for adults and \$11 for children 12 and under, with discounts for military members and their families. The parade, a tradition that's a century old this year, starts at 10 a.m. in downtown Belton, at 101 Central Avenue. Also part of the celebrations is the Festival on Nolan Creek, which starts at 11 a.m. at Yettie Polk Park at 101 South Davis. The event will offer live music headlined by Shevi Love, shopping, food and children's entertainment. To end the evening, many people head over to the Backyard Party at Schoepf's for bands and fireworks following the show. Gates open at 6 p.m. and music starts at 7 p.m. The barbecue restaurant is located at 702 E. Central Ave. For more details and a schedule of events, visit www.rodeobelton.com.

SALADO

The Salado Historical Society will hold its annual free "potluck picnic" in the Salado High School auditorium, 1880 Williams Drive, Salado, beginning at noon on July 4. Two local politicians will be speaking, with Representative Brad Buckley as the keynote speaker and Senator Dawn Buckingham also making

an appearance.

The Salado Community Chorus will provide patriotic music as people chow down on fried chicken provided by the historical society. People are encouraged to bring side dishes or desserts to share.

For information call Sandi Wicker at 254-760-9655.

GATESVILLE

The City of Gatesville will host a fireworks display from 9:30 to 10:30 p.m. Seating is available at McKamie Stadium at the high school, 205 Lovers Lane.

Closings

KILLEEN

City Hall is closed but emergency services and garbage collection will operate without interruption. The Family Aquatics Center at Lions Club Park will be open 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Long Branch Pool will be open 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. The Family Recreation Center at Lions Club Park, Killeen Community Center, both senior centers and all libraries will be closed. All city offices will reopen Friday, July 5, for normal hours of operation.

HARKER HEIGHTS

Harker Heights City Hall will be closed July 4 but resume normal business hours on July 5. Garbage services will run one day late after the holiday

through July 6 and the normal schedule will resume the week of July 8.

COPPERAS COVE

City offices will be closed and garbage collection for residential customers will be on a different schedule. Areas 1 and 2 trash collection will be July 1; Areas 3 and 4 trash collection will be July 2; Areas 5 and 6 will be July 3; and Areas 7 and 8 will be July 5. The schedule can also be seen on the city's website. For more information, call the solid waste department at 254-547-4242.

TEMPLE

City offices will be closed. Garbage pickup for Thursday will be on Wednesday, July 3.

BELTON

City offices are closed and garbage service will be delayed one day for the remainder of the week.

SALADO

City Hall will be closed and garbage services will not be affected because the Village of Salado does not have garbage services on Thursdays.

LAMPASAS

City offices and the library will be closed. Garbage pickup will be the next business day following the holiday.

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