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All About San Antonio

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Source: Business Journals Book of Lists Survey, Summer 2012 (Subscribers with gross sales/revenues of \$500 K + per year)

COVER STORY

Cradle of Commerce

BY MICHELE McMURRY

The Alamo City. It's our city's moniker. But interestingly the Alamo – our city's most sacred historical treasure – is not the main reason some 30 million people visit San Antonio each year.

Although the Cradle of Texas Liberty makes Texas Highway's list of top 10 destinations, it falls well behind the River Walk, the San Antonio Zoo, SeaWorld San Antonio and Six Flags Fiesta Texas, all of which offer more of the family experience that most visitors to the area seek, says Marco Barros, president and CEO of the San Antonio Area Tourism Council.

"The Alamo contributes," Barros says, "but its 1.4 (million) to 1.5 million visitors are not as significant as the number of visitors who come and enjoy the River Walk."

In comparison, the San Antonio River Walk brings in 11.5 million visitors, 2.2 million of them local. However, tourism here overall is on the rise and has increased by more than 7 percent during the past three years, Barros adds.

"San Antonio is the destination for Texans and it shows in their repeat visitation," he says.

So, why are some passing up the shrine?

If you improvement it, they will come The San Antonio Tourism Council has advised Alamo management on several improvements over the years, including the addition of park benches, tours and retail merchandise, sales of which account for most of the attraction's annual revenues.

Since contracting operations to third party firm Event Network in 2012, sales in the newly remodeled gift shop have increased by 63 percent, with net revenues totaling \$2.6 million in 2013 and already nearing the \$2 million mark for the first half of 2014.

To place it in a broader context, San Antonio's tourism and hospitality industry draws in an estimated \$12 billion in total economic impact annually, making it one of the city's largest industries. If the Alamo can play a more prominent role in the city's tourism and hospitality sector, it could create an even greater economic windfall for San Antonio hotels, restaurants, bars and other attractions.

"We just need to continue to offer ideas and make the front entrance to the Alamo a better experience for pedestrian and walking tours," Barros says.

Efforts toward preservation and improving the grounds and visitor experience have heightened since the changing of the guard in 2011, when the Texas General Land Office (GLO) assumed control of the Alamo complex from the Daughters of the Republic of Texas (DRT), which continues to play a role in its day-to-day operations.

"We've worked to expand the narrative beyond the siege," says GLO spokesman Jim Suydam. "We are working to tell the entire story."

Working together, the GLO and DRT have diversified events and exhibits – including the unveiling of William Travis' "Victory or Death" letter last year and they have planned a special exhibit that will take place in October that will showcase historical firearms.

"People will be able to hold a Kentucky rifle, which makes it real," Suydam adds.

A new film about the Alamo, produced by the History Channel, is also currently in the works for the museum.

Generating the latest buzz is musical artist Phil Collins' extensive private collection of documents and artifacts from

RENEWED INTEREST IN THE ALAMO COULD MEAN MORE VISITORS AND MORE TOURISM DOLLARS FOR THE CITY

the Texas Revolution and the Battle of the Alamo, which he is donating to the state. Documentation of some 2,000 items – outnumbering the 1,200 already housed at the Alamo – is currently under way at his home in Lake Geneva, Switzerland.

"There's a lot of interest, but people know the collection won't get here until later this year," says Melinda Tomerlin, executive administrator of the Alamo.

The next question is where it will go once it arrives. Hope is that the Alamo Foundation, a nonprofit created by the GLO, will raise the funds required to build a visitors center to house the delicate items.

"We're not sure where this would go," says Suydam. "Maybe outside the footprint of the Alamo."

What's your Alamo I.Q.?

So now we know where the Alamo is heading in the future. But how well do you know its past? For instance, do you know how the Alamo got its name or who first uttered the words, "Remember the Alamo?"

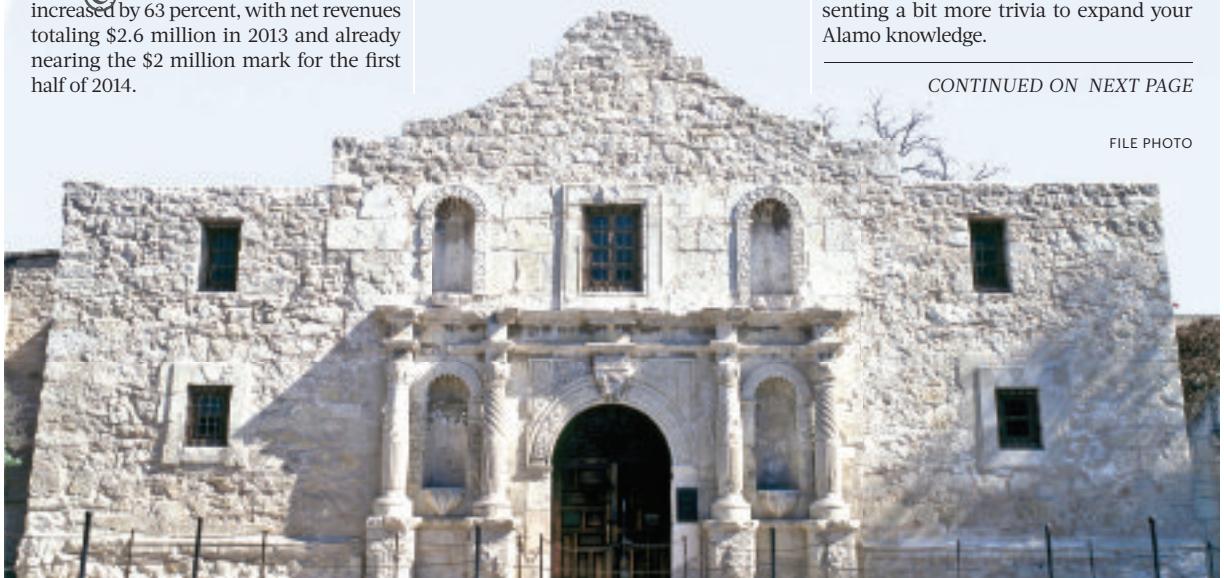
We quizzed our online readers to discover their Alamo know-how. Our audience had to answer seven questions that tested their knowledge of the venerable institution. When the dust settled, the majority of readers answered each question correctly but some of those questions were downright difficult.

For example, when we asked "Who is the only Alamo defender to receive a proper Christian burial?" 67 percent of respondents answered correctly that Mexican General Santa Anna allowed Gregorio Esparza's brother, who served as a soldier in the Mexican Army, to bury him.

In addition to the online quiz, we're presenting a bit more trivia to expand your Alamo knowledge.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

FILE PHOTO



COVER STORY

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So, how did the Alamo get its name?

Apart from any defining moment, there are early references to Alamo de Parras, a Spanish colonial company that migrated to aid the San Antonio garrison in the early 1800s. The former Mission San Antonio de Valero, at some point, was said to be renamed the Alamo to mark the company's integration and subsequent involvement in the Mexican War of Independence and the Texan Revolution.

A second theory attributes the name to the Spanish word álamo (poplar tree) and the cottonwood trees that surrounded the area.

The "Come and Take It" flag was flown over the Battle of the Alamo. True or false?

False. The "Come and Take It" reference refers to a canon provided by Mexican authorities to the settlers of Gonzales for protection from Indian raids. As political unrest and revolts between Texian rebels and Mexican troops ensued, the Mexican commander requested the return of the canon, a request that was vehemently refused and ultimately led to the Battle of Gonzales on Oct. 2, 1835. Though a relatively small military skirmish in itself, the battle triggered the Texas Revolution.

How did soldiers carry gun powder during battle?

Before the invention of cartridges, soldiers carried powder inside repurposed horns of animals, mostly cows and bulls, which they strapped across their shoulders. Airtight, waterproof and naturally hollow, animal horns could be loaded with powder from the wide end that would dispense from the narrow pointed end.

After each fire, soldiers would retreat to safe areas to reload lest they be shot, a process that could take as long as two minutes. Many powder horns were engraved and decorated works of art.

Who were the first company of Texan volunteers?

The New Orleans Greys, organized at Banks Arcade in New Orleans, came to Texas in October 1835. They participated in the Siege and Battle of Bejar and the Battle of Goliad as one of the most effective forces in the Texas Revolution. Many lost their lives at the Battle of the Alamo.

Why are only men asked to remove hats inside the Alamo?

Signs upon entering the Shrine that request the lowering of voices, silencing of cell phones and a man's removal of his hat evoke welcome tones of reverence in our electronic age. When we asked a docent why only men should remove their hats, he cited Southern tradition. A lady's hat is considered part of her attire, and in early periods, such removal could ruin her carefully coiffed tresses. The only exception would be if it were obscuring someone's view.

What comedian talk show host filmed a skit depositing his Alamo rental car at the Shrine instead of the airport?

Jay Leno, for a 1995 episode of "The Tonight Show." The taped spot, in tandem with an earlier incident of motorcyclists who commandeered the area for a personal photo, led to the Bexar County Historical Commission's voting to censure the City of San Antonio for allowing both the motorcyclists, and later, Leno's car, to park near a possible cemetery site. Prior to Leno's eight-hour visit to San Antonio, talks of permanent street closures around the Alamo had been prompted by complaints from American Indians concerned about the graves of Native Americans who were buried there during mission times.

Where did the phrase "Remember the Alamo" come from?

"Remember the Alamo" was first uttered as the famous battle cry by Texian forces under General Sam Houston as they overtook Mexican General Santa Anna's army in the Battle of San Jacinto, the most decisive battle of the Texas Revolution. The cry represents the voice of a unified people basking in the defeat of tyranny. It was revived 10 years later by U.S. soldiers fighting in the Mexican-American War.

Michelle McMurry is a San Antonio freelance writer.

BLOG The final quiz results can be found here: <http://bizj.us/11jwk3>

WHAT'S IN A NAME**SHRINE'S MONIKER POPULAR CHOICE AMONG LOCAL BUSINESSES**

A quick directory search of local businesses sporting "Alamo" in their title brings up nearly 900 listings. They range from the Alamodome, Alamo Chamber of Commerce and Alamo Café to hundreds of insurance agencies, automotive shops, veterinary and medical clinics, even night clubs.

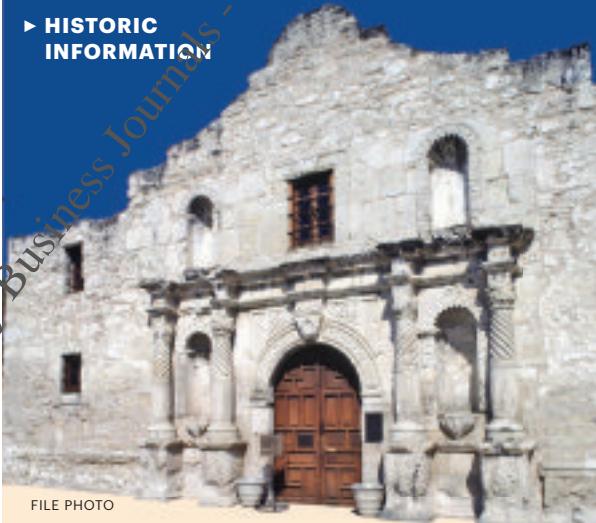
We talked with one business owner who went beyond choosing the name for the city moniker or preferred placement in the alphabet, but instead for historical homage. Eugene Simor, president of Alamo Beer Co., established his microbrewery on N. Cherry St. to resurrect an "Alamo" beer like such that was brewed by the old Lone Star Brewing

Company in 1884 and sadly not remembered post-Prohibition. Simor decided to "come and take" the nationally registered trademark Alamo in the beer category and began brewing in 1997 with the help of then San Antonio-based Frio Brewing Company and Real Ale Brewing Company in Blanco.

Alamo Beer enthusiasts even wear coon skin caps and raise a pint in honor of Davy Crockett's birthday each year on Aug. 17.

"It's a good holiday and the right month for drinking cold beer," Simor says.

— Michele McMurry

HISTORIC INFORMATION

FILE PHOTO

THE TWO ROSES OF TEXAS

Most are familiar with the legend of Emily (D. West) Morgan, an attractive mulatto slave credited with distracting General Santa Anna from his battle duties at San Jacinto and thus facilitating Texan victory. Fact or fiction, her association with the famed folk tune "The Yellow Rose of Texas" is in keeping with the term "high yellow" once used to describe biracial, light-skinned black people in the South.

In his most recent work, "The Other Rose of Texas," historian and author Dean Kirkpatrick flirts with the notion of another rose in Texas history — Jim Bowie's young wife Ursula de Veramendi — and how her inspiration might have influenced Bowie's position on slave trading.

BATTLE BASICS

The famous 13 Days of the Battle of the Alamo began on Feb. 23, 1836, with the arrival of Mexican general and dictator Antonio López de Santa Anna and his troops in San Antonio, set to seize the Alamo. This came as a surprise to Alamo commanders who weren't expecting his arrival until weeks later.

The days that followed were filled with Mexican insurgence and derailed efforts to bring aid to the Texans. Santa Anna's forces defeated the Alamo just before dawn on March 6, 1836 in a bloody 90-minute battle.



Antonio López de Santa Anna

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