

Presidio's Founding Day to be celebration of historic proportions

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There has never been a shortage of things to celebrate in Santa Barbara, but today sees a commemoration that honors the very heart and soul of the city.

Through a series of public events called Celebrate Santa Barbara, the Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation is celebrating both the city's 233-year history and its birthplace at El Presidio de Santa Bárbara State Historic Park.

The two-day event got underway Friday with a candlelight dinner in the historic Presidio Chapel. It will continue today at the Presidio and the surrounding neighborhood with the Founding Day Festival and a newly established live-music event

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called Rancho Roundup.

"We wanted to do something different this year for our annual Founding Day Festival," said Jarrell C. Jackman, executive director of the Santa Barbara Trust for Historic Preservation.

"So we're having three different events that are all part of the Founding Day celebration. We've held separate events and we've hosted dinners before, but we've never done anything like the Rancho Roundup

so this will be a whole new ballgame for us."

Expanding the festival is meant to "get more people down here to the Presidio and to learn what it's all about," Mr. Jackman told the News-Press. "We really wanted to have a celebration that cuts across various age groups, ethnicity and cultural backgrounds. This neighborhood has a very diverse tradition so that

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HELENA DAY BREESE/NEWS-PRESS

A candlelight dinner Friday evening at the historic Presidio Chapel opened a two-day celebration of the founding of Santa Barbara.

Festival features re-enactment of city's founding

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plays a big part in our programming."

The Trust for Historic Preservation was founded in 1963 by Pearl Chase in collaboration with other community leaders. The nonprofit was the primary force in the reconstruction and preservation of the Presidio, the 18th century birthplace of Santa Barbara, and the nearby Casa de la Guerra, the 1820s home of Santa Barbara patriarch José de la Guerra.

Founding Day was introduced in the 1970s to celebrate those rich roots.

"We've been doing these events since back in the 1970s when Pearl Chase, the founding mother of what so much of Santa Barbara is today, would put on Founding Day celebrations at City Hall," explained Mr. Jackman, who has been at the helm of the trust since 1981. "We brought it to the Presidio in the early '80s and have been doing it here annually for about 35 years."

Friday's candlelight dinner featured a formal red-carpet entrance into the candlelit Presidio Chapel where guests enjoyed a four-course dinner by Montecito Country Club executive chef Michael Blackwell. Period costume and live music furthered the dinner's unique taste of the past.

Today's festival gets underway at

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11 a.m. with a church service in the Presidio Chapel, then moves outside for a range of performances and activities.

Los Soldados del Real Presidio de Santa Bárbara, early California dance and musical performances, and the presentation of Saint Barbara 2015 by the Native Daughters of the Golden West Reina del Mar Parlor No. 126, will take place in the grounds of the Presidio with the historic building serving as a backdrop.

One of the highlights will be the annual Founding Day re-creation. The event will feature a costumed re-enactment of the city's founding ceremony on April 21, 1782.

Various educational activities will be staged throughout the Presidio, focusing on the history and culture of early California. The public will have the opportunity to converse with costumed re-enactors and experience life in Santa Barbara as it was during the late-1700s while learning about heritage gardening, colonial cooking, pottery making and Chumash storytelling.

From 1 to 3 p.m. the Architectural

Foundation of Santa Barbara will offer free sketch session for the Kids Draw Architecture program.

The inaugural Rancho Roundup, 4 to 10 p.m. on an outdoor stage in the Presidio's parking lot, will feature local bands The Double Wide Kings, Gene Evaro Jr. & The Family, Young Millions and The Caverns.

Food will be available for purchase from Georgia's Smokehouse as will locally made beer from Figueroa Mountain.

The Trust for Historic Preservation hopes Rancho Roundup will not only become as synonymous with Founding Day as its Casa Cantina has with Fiesta, but will introduce a new generation of Santa Barbarans to their historic roots.

"The idea is to create an annual outdoor event at the Presidio with music," Mr. Jackman said. "A lot of the younger crowd have probably never been here so this is a way to not just help people have a good time, but to let them know how their town began."

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