



Downtown Movie Nights

San Antonio is the seventh largest city in the country and is at a crossroads of exciting downtown growth and revitalization. As one of the country's most unique cities, San Antonio is celebrating 300 years of rich history, culture, and prosperity this year. The Tricentennial anniversary not only marks where San Antonio has been, but it also sets the course for where it is going. Initiatives led by SA Tomorrow's Downtown Plan, Activate Houston Street, and the recent Federal Historic Designation are helping create a vibrant city center.

Building on the various revitalization efforts and the community's vision for downtown, the City of San Antonio established Downtown Movie Nights in 2014 to promote activation in public spaces. The free movie screenings are hosted throughout downtown within various cultural public spaces including Travis Park, Alameda Theater, and La Villita's Arneson River Theatre.

Travis Park is one of oldest municipal parks in the nation. Strategically located between the new \$203 million Tobin Arts Performing Arts Center and the historic St. Anthony Hotel, the 2.6 acre park's central location makes it a unique destination for locals and visitors alike. The revitalized urban park has hosted an outdoor summer film series, "Movies by Moonlight", for the past four years. This event has brought new life to the public space, creating a vibrant space that connects people and strengthens the community.

Along Houston Street, the Alameda Theater opened in 1949 as a thriving urban theater. It has been closed for decades, despite several efforts at restoration over the years. In 2017, a \$26 million initiative between the City of San Antonio, Bexar County, and Texas Public Radio was announced that will restore the historic theater to its former glory. The Alameda Theater hosted a free all-day movie event that reinvigorated a vacant historic theater and highlighted its potential for reinvestment.

Located further south on the bank of the famed San Antonio River Walk, the Arneson River Theatre, located in La Villita Historic Arts Village, is a unique outdoor venue that has hosted free movies for the community for over four years. The movie nights at La Villita push the Arneson River Theatre to its capacity of 1,000 attendees. La Villita is on the National Register of Historic Places as a Historic District, which allows the entire community to enjoy unique movie screenings nestled in architecture and history along the San Antonio River.

Downtown Movie Night events are made possible with sponsorships from local entities and partnerships. The City of San Antonio identified community partners to assist with programming, activation, and free artistic and educational activities for the community. Attendance has more than surpassed the original attendance and engagement goals. The City has also partnered with a local cinema company to provide the outdoor movie screen and licensing for the films. Downtown Movie Nights evoke nostalgia, promote heritage, and connect the community to the places that make San Antonio unique.

Innovation: At Travis Park and La Villita, the outdoor movies are accompanied by food trucks, themed giveaways, and pre-show programming, such as photo booths, art and educational



activities for children, and special appearances from actors dressed as characters from the movie. For example, Travis Park hosted an appearance from Cinderella where families could meet and take pictures with the princess, and then view “Cinderella” on the big screen. For Valentine’s Day 2018, La Villita polled the public to pick their favorite movie – the choice was “The Princess Bride”. City staff programmed the event with a food truck, a photo booth with complimentary props to go with the movie, custom Valentine’s Day packages curated by a local small business, and educational demonstrations on how to create the perfect cup of Mexican hot chocolate.

In an effort to address parking challenges, most of the movie nights are also shown on Downtown Tuesday, which provides free parking in City operated lots, garages, and meters after 5pm. The movie nights have not only attracted a diverse crowd, but each event and venue is well-attended. The Arneson River Theatre hosts 1,000 people while there are typically 2,000 attendees at Travis Park. Downtown Movie Nights at the Alameda Theater hosted hundreds of visitors who experienced a free, full-day of movies complete with a stunning red carpet, Hollywood lights, and delicious food from a variety of food trucks.

Replication: Outdoor movie nights can be experienced anywhere in the world. Other downtowns can take advantage of their outdoor public spaces and program them with a community event, which can include arts and educational activities for kids of all ages, local live music, food trucks, concession stands, and outdoor movies. Cities also have an opportunity to highlight the potential for activation and renovation by hosting events such as film festivals and movie screenings in vacant buildings and underutilized spaces.

Representation: The Downtown Movie Nights are free and open to the public. The movies are frequented by a diverse crowd, consisting primarily of families; all movies are family friendly. The City of San Antonio manages the events, but relies on partners to bring a variety of family friendly programming. In the past, these partners have included Hemisfair, Artpace, the San Antonio Aquarium, the San Antonio Zoo, the San Antonio Public Library, the DoSeum, SNIPSA, and local radio stations.

Sustainability: The Downtown Movie Nights have proven to be highly successful and have garnered public awareness, participation and support from the community. The Downtown Movie Nights will continue with support from City departments and community partners.