



SAN ANTONIO
EXPRESS-NEWS

S.A. TRICENTENNIAL
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TRICENTENNIAL
CALENDAR

TODAY

10th Annual Walk Like MADD: Eisenhower Park, 19399 Northwest Military Highway, walklikemadd.org. Mothers Against Drunk Driving will hold its annual walk to raise awareness and funds to support the organization's mission of creating a future without victims of drunken driving. \$25. Registration starts at 8:30 a.m.

España Antigua, Nueva España: San Fernando Cathedral, 115 W. Main Plaza, austinbaroqueorchestra.org. Concert of sacred music from 16th- and 17th-century Spain and Mexico by Austin Baroque Orchestra & Chorus. \$30. 8 p.m.

UPCOMING

Farm Day at Mission San Juan: Mission San Juan, 9101 Graf Road, nps.gov/saan/index.htm. Free family-friendly event to highlight the Spanish Colonial demonstration farm. 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Nov. 10.

Solar Fest 2018: HemisFair, 434 S. Alamo St., buildsagreen.org. Live music, local artisans, a variety of food trucks and engaging activities celebrating renewable energy and energy efficiency. Free. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Nov. 17

SPORTS

LANDING THE SPURS TRANSFORMED CITY

First investors wanted to raise S.A.'s visibility

FROM EXPRESS-NEWS ARCHIVES

When B.J. "Red" McCombs and about 30 other local investors gathered downtown 45 years ago to discuss bringing pro basketball to San Antonio, their interest in the sport was minimal at best.

"I doubt there was a real basketball fan in the whole group," McCombs said. "I certainly was not. I was a baseball, football guy."

But McCombs wasn't nearly as bad as Marshall Steves, patriarch of one of the city's pioneering industrial families.

"You can count me in," Steves, now deceased, told McCombs and the group's leader, the late Angelo Drossos. "But as far as pro basketball goes, I'd rather watch water drip from a faucet."

"They forever changed the city," Brandon Parrott said in 2009 while with not-for-profit Slam Dunk for Life. He's now athletic director at San Antonio Christian School.

Transforming the city's image was exactly what the investors had in mind when they paid \$200,000 upfront to lease the financially troubled Dallas Chaparrals of the American Basketball Associa-



Staff file photos

David Robinson is considered a major reason the Spurs have survived in San Antonio, but the team never would have moved here in the first place without Angelo Drossos, center, Red McCombs and the rest of the original ownership group.

tion in 1973. Later that season, the group bought the newly renamed San Antonio Spurs outright for an additional \$600,000.

"It was a totally civic venture whose sole purpose was to gain visibility for San Antonio on the national sports scene," McCombs said. "I told the other investors at the outset this was something that had been losing about \$800,000 each year in Dallas, and we couldn't reasonably expect to do better."

McCombs and the late real estate developer John Schaefer pledged to buy the largest chunks of stock — 25 percent each — while the others cut up the rest. Drossos ran the club's day-to-day operations for sweat equity only.

"We brought the team to San Antonio to put the city on the sports map," Schaefer said in 2009. "It wasn't for profit. In those days, if you went to Chicago or Detroit and mentioned San Antonio, people would say, 'Oh, you



The Spurs' first investors included Art Burdick, from left, John Schaefer and Red McCombs.

mean the city down by the border?' Once we got in the ABA, it became, 'That's where the Spurs are.'"

But some investors had other reasons for getting involved. That was true of two of the youngest, dentist Linton Weems and homebuilder Art Burdick, one of the few investors familiar with pro basketball.

"I had grown up in the Chicago area, and my dad had season tickets to the Bulls," Burdick said. "Having grown up exposed to pro sports, the opportunity to get involved in it was a dream come true."

Being an investor gave Weems the chance to rub elbows with the city's movers and shakers.

"There was 'Papa' Joe Straus, Angelo Drossos, Leo Rose, John Schaefer," said Weems. "I was the minnow amongst the

Moby Dicks, but I still got to do what they did."

And that included participating in the group's often raucous quarterly meetings.

"There was head bashing and fighting and cussing," Weems said. "There was none of this sitting around civilized, having a little coffee."

Thanks to Drossos' shrewd stewardship, the Spurs entered the NBA in 1976 after raising the number of investors from 35 to 63.

By the late 1980s, the investors had all become basketball fans — even Steves, who died in 2000.

"He'd be incredibly pleased to see the Spurs become what they have," said his son, Edward Steves.

A version of this report by Tom Orsborn ran April 14, 2009.