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A Bold Vision for Balboa Park Centennial Celebration



By GEORGE MULLEN

Though in dire straits, San Diego's 2015 Centennial Celebration can be saved — provided the right vision and leadership is quickly embraced.

The problem from the get-go has been the absence of a Centennial vision. Without a compelling vision, we don't know where we're going, and thus, there can be no community buy-in or basis for fundraising. Furthermore, we must stop viewing this as a Balboa Park event — this is a San Diego event. The Centennial does not mark the birth of Balboa Park as many believe (that happened in 1868); it marks the Panama-California Exposition of 1915 that was San Diego's "Birth of Life" as a major metropolitan city. This is what our Centennial is really about, and it warrants a grand celebration.

As such, I propose the following Centennial vision for our community to consider — bold, achievable, and with a meaningful legacy for San Diego:

The Centennial Celebration will last 90 days, from Aug. 15 – Nov. 15, 2015. In preparation, the Centennial logo and title will be immediately revamped in order to pique interest and ignite imaginations. We would seek to erect a huge, temporary electronic screen on the east wall of the airport's commuter terminal for the purpose of artistically promoting the Centennial, commencing Jan. 1, 2015. With 18 million annual airport travelers, this high-impact marketing will build excitement and fill hotel rooms. (This screen could ultimately become the West Coast alternative to New Year's Eve in Times Square.) Furthermore, San Diego would temporarily brand itself as the City of Life/Ciudad de Vida to invoke our Celebration of Life year and position as Gateway to Latin America.

On Aug. 15, 2015, the Centennial will officially begin with a U.S. Navy carrier leading an Armada of sea craft into San Diego Harbor — Blue Angels streaking across the sky, hot air balloons rising on the perimeters, fireworks, opening ceremonies atop the Midway.

The Centennial theme will be “Innovation, Drones & Beer” with Balboa Park center stage. San Diego is a global innovation capital in life sciences, telecom, high-tech, clean-tech, etc. — an InnovationRealization Tent will exhibit our best. San Diego is a center in drone manufacturing — a vast collection will be displayed with military, Amazon.com, and agricultural examples. (Invoking our military, aviation history, and Air & Space Museum.) San Diego is a brewing mecca and Plaza de Panama will host a vast Craft-Beer Garden. (Museum of Man's Beerology exhibit tying in.)

Our Centennial marketing jingles will be “Innovation and Drones and Beer, Oh My” and “There's no place like home.” Our decorative theme will be a whimsical mixture of Oz, Dr. Seuss's Whoville, Hotel del Coronado, California Tower. Young actors will roam Balboa Park in thematic clothing. Our museums and theaters will do what they do best — putting on crowd-drawing exhibits and performances. The focus will be on bringing people to Balboa Park via appealing monthly programming:

Cities of Life Month (August): Every city and community in San Diego County will be invited to build and operate a display booth to promote themselves; including Tijuana and Rosarito. This month will include a contest to build the best mythical sand-city.

Military Appreciation Month (September): The branches of the U.S. military, as well as local first-responders, will each be invited to build and operate a display booth highlighting their service and history. This month will include a contest to build the best Lego-military theme.

Oktoberfest Month (October): Craft-Beer Gardens Galore. This month will include a contest for the best Centennial-themed body tattoos; Comic-Con Centennial Weird-Out Weekend appreciation event; and Chargers & Padres Weekend with professional players roaming the park and fans donning jerseys.

Tribal Heritage Month (November): Every Indian tribe in San Diego County will be invited to build and operate a display booth highlighting their tribal culture and history. This month will include an Innovadora/Innovation Conference; IDEA District Forum; and Contemporary Art Fair.

Last, but not least, the Ultimate Centennial Sporting Challenge will be held across San Diego County featuring enduro and BMX Racing, skateboarding, surfing, sailing, “100” miler bikathon, and marathon. This will be the perfect sporting platform to showcase San Diego as the ideal city to host the 2024 Summer Olympics.

This is a working framework. There will be changes, additions, and eliminations, but it is a terrific starting point.

Community before self — Go!

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