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# BELTON AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE WELCOMES ALL TO CELEBRATE THE 4TH

Welcome to the Belton 4<sup>th</sup> of July Celebration! We are excited to continue our cherished annual traditions again this year. The theme this year is “Celebrating 250 Years of America.” All across the country people will be celebrating the birth of the USA and the original Declaration of Independence.

The parade and rodeo are treasured traditions of our community, with generations of families joining together to celebrate the birth of our country, patriotism, and family values. In recent years, USA Today has referred to Belton as one of the top 10 places in the country to celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

The Belton Area Chamber of Commerce coordinates the festivities in partnership with event sponsors, the City of Belton, and an army of volunteers. We anticipate record participation and spectators this year, surpassing even the huge annual crowds that have made it the largest annual event in our area. It is estimated that over 50,000 people participate in the activities during the week of July 4<sup>th</sup> in Belton

This year, the Chamber is bringing back the popular Downtown Belton Street Party on the Courthouse Square on Saturday, June 27. This will be a great way to kick off the weeklong celebration with live music, food trucks, family games, and craft beer. The event is free and open to the public. Featured entertainment includes the return of popular bands, Grupo Pession and the Leon River Band, with the addition of the Jerry Haisler Trio.

The 102<sup>nd</sup> Annual Belton 4<sup>th</sup> of July PRCA/WPRA Rodeo will run July 2-4 at the Cadence Bank Center, providing exciting action and great family entertainment. Each night includes exciting PRCA and WPRA events, as well as the always popular Mutton Bustin’. Thursday is Hometown Heroes Night, honoring our first responders and educators. Friday is Military Appreciation Night where we celebrate our veterans and soldiers and families from Fort Hood and the surrounding area. Saturday is Family Night where we feature special ticket discounts and opportunities for children to participate in the Stickhorse Stampede presented by KPA Engineers in the arena prior to the rodeo.

Saturday, July 4<sup>th</sup> will be a full day of festivities with the Patriotic Program, Parade, Festival on Nolan Creek, and ending with the Backyard Party at Schoepf’s Concert and Fireworks, featuring the return of Sprung, and an awesome fireworks display. The concert and fireworks show is a free, open to the public, non-ticketed event, however, seating is only available through sponsorships and paid reservation of picnic tables.

The Festival on Nolan Creek in Yettie Polk Park will include food trucks, vendors, the “Rev, White & Blue Car Show.” and a special static display of equipment from Fort Hood.

“We are excited about the variety of activities for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Celebration again this year,” stated Randy Pittenger, Belton Area Chamber President/CEO. “This is a wonderful opportunity for our community to celebrate together while bringing huge crowds of people to Belton to enjoy what we have to offer. It also serves as a great opportunity for our sponsors to get their message out to thousands of people. Thank you for joining us in Belton to celebrate 250 years of our country.”

For more information about these events or other activities and programs of the Belton Area Chamber of Commerce, visit the website at [www.beltonchamber.com](http://www.beltonchamber.com), call 254-939-3551, or email [info@beltonchamber.com](mailto:info@beltonchamber.com).



Photos included in this edition are courtesy of: Belton Area Chamber of Commerce, Bell County Museum, Lena Armstrong Public Library, The Belton Journal, Staci Schoepf, and Jennifer Joy Martin.

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## ANNUAL EVENTS

SELECT SATURDAYS	EVERY SATURDAY	3RD FRIDAY MONTHLY	SELECT WEEKENDS	FEBRUARY	FEBRUARY
<b>NOLAN CREEK SATURDAY MARKET</b> 219 S EAST ST. 	<b>ARTISAN MARKET</b> 411 E CENTRAL AVE. 	<b>PISTON'S ON THE CREEK</b> 219 S EAST ST. 	<b>A SAMI SHOW - ARTS &amp; CRAFTS MARKET</b> 301 W LOOP 121 	<b>BELL COUNTY YOUTH FAIR</b> 301 W LOOP 121 	<b>HOME &amp; GARDEN SHOW</b> 301 W LOOP 121 
FEBRUARY	FEBRUARY - MARCH	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	SATURDAYS MAY - SEPT
<b>FATHER DAUGHTER DANCE</b> 401 N ALEXANDER ST. 	<b>CARDEN CIRCUS</b> 301 W LOOP 121 	<b>UMHB EASTER PAGEANT</b> 900 COLLEGE ST. 	<b>BELTON MARKET DAYS</b> DOWNTOWN BELTON 	<b>LEGENDS ON THE CHISHOLM TRAIL</b> 219 S EAST ST. 	<b>BELL COUNTY FARMERS MARKET</b> 411 E CENTRAL AVE. 
GO TO WEBSITE FOR DATES	JUNE - JULY	JULY	JULY	AUGUST 1 - 2	SEPTEMBER 3 - 6
<b>SCHOEPF'S MUSIC SERIES</b> 702 E CENTRAL AVE. SCHOEPFSBBQ.COM 	<b>4TH OF JULY CELEBRATION</b> DOWNTOWN STREET PARTY, PATRIOTIC PROGRAM, PARADE, FESTIVAL, RODEO, BACKYARD PARTY 	<b>ROCKIN' ROTARY</b> 702 E CENTRAL AVE. 	<b>BELTON PARKS &amp; REC MONTH</b> FOR EVENTS GO TO: BELTONTXAS.GOV 	<b>BELL COUNTY COMIC CON</b> 301 W LOOP 121 	<b>CENTRAL TEXAS STATE FAIR</b> 301 W LOOP 121 
GO TO WEBSITE FOR DATES	SEPTEMBER 25 - 26	OCTOBER 16 - 17	OCTOBER 25	NOVEMBER 21	DECEMBER 4 - 5
<b>UMHB FOOTBALL GAMES</b> HOME GAMES AT 905 UNIVERSITY DR. UMHB.EDU 	<b>BELTON'S BACON, BLUES, &amp; BREWS</b> DOWNTOWN BELTON 	<b>POLKA ON THE SQUARE</b> DOWNTOWN BELTON 	<b>CANDY TRAIL</b> DOWNTOWN BELTON 	<b>BELTON MARKET DAYS</b> DOWNTOWN BELTON 	<b>CHRISTMAS ON THE CHISHOLM TRAIL</b> DOWNTOWN BELTON 



For more events visit **SeeBelton.com**



# ANNUAL WEEKLONG LINEUP OF EVENTS FOR JULY 4TH IN BELTON

This year's July 4th celebration is a special one. With the 250th anniversary of our country, this year's July 4th has a little more special meaning. Many of us were around in 1976 for the 200th celebration. For those who were not around in 1976, hopefully you make it for the 300th.

With an estimated 30,000+ people lining the streets, and a live televised broadcast reaching around the world, the over 100-year tradition of the Belton 4th of July Celebration will include a 1 1/2 mile parade route running south on Main Street (FM317) from the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor to the Bell County Courthouse, then east on Central Avenue, and north on Birdwell to the Belton Police Memorial.

Following the parade, much of the crowd moves to the adjacent Liberty Park for the Festival on Nolan Creek, featuring food and craft vendors, games, a petting zoo, static displays of military and first-responder equipment, and live entertainment at the centrally located gazebo.

The three-night PRCA Rodeo is held July 2-4 at the Cadence Bank Center, an indoor, air-conditioned facility with a capacity for 5,900 rodeo attendees. Cowboys from around the country descend on the only PRCA Rodeo in Texas during this holiday weekend, making it a must-see event.

Kicking off a weeklong celebration with the Downtown Street Party and Concert on June 27th, everyone will enjoy live music, food trucks, craft beer and wine, activities and games, and fun for all. The celebratory week will conclude on July 4th with the Backyard Party at Schoepf's, featuring a Concert and Fireworks show beginning at 6pm, with a repeat crowd favorite on stage: Sprung. Best of all, both of these events are free and open to the public.

The Belton 4th of July Celebration is promoted extensively throughout Central Texas with a professional marketing campaign supported by local and regional media sponsors and marketing partners. Benefits to sponsors include access to high-volume pedestrian traffic, promotion through the marketing campaign, support of our local military families, the opportunity to be part of a "feel good" community event, and the chance to engage with a multicultural, family-friendly audience at the largest annual event in our Central Texas area. For more details on each of the events, please visit [beltonchamber.com](http://beltonchamber.com)



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# WELCOME TO BELL COUNTY!

We're so glad you're here! Whether you're visiting, relocating, or just passing through, Bell County welcomes you with open arms and a true taste of Texas charm. Nestled in the heart of Central Texas, our county is rich in history, natural beauty, and a strong sense of community.

From the scenic views of Belton Lake to the vibrant culture of towns like Belton, Killeen, and Temple, there's something for everyone to enjoy. Explore our parks, taste some local barbecue, and experience the warm hospitality that makes Bell County special.



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# AMERICA CELEBRATES MILESTONE BIRTHDAY

By David Stone

The Belton Journal

250 years ago, America chose freedom from a European government. A revolution ensued, and this year “freedom” will be celebrated in every city, every town, every stretch of American road.

From a string of colonies to a continental power, the United States built railroads, raised cities, expanded opportunity and pushed the boundaries of science, the military, industry, and human achievement. These boundaries are economic keystones in Bell County cities such as Belton, Temple and Killeen.

Nationwide, Freedom Trucks — a collection of mobile US history museums — will be traveling highways to big cities and small towns to help celebrate America’s big birthday. The trucks started rolling June 4.

Stops in Texas include Port Aransas on Sept. 10-14 at Roberts Point Park, Dallas on Sept. 23 through Oct. 19 at The Texas State Fair, Denton on Nov. 3-5 at the Peterbilt Division offices, Cypress on Nov. 9-10 at Cypress Christian School, and Dripping Springs on Nov. 30 through Dec. 6 at Dripping Springs Community Center.

In addition to Freedom trucks, Americans will be celebrating the Fourth with extra “oomph” this year because of the 250th anniversary. And, of course, Washington, DC, will host many patriotic events for the anniversary, including a Great American State Fair from June 25 to July 10 on the National Mall.

The Fair will bring together all 50 U.S. states and six territories in a World Fair-style celebration of America’s 250th birthday, featuring live entertainment, immersive exhibits, patriotic tributes, innovation showcases, cultural programming, and family-friendly attractions stretching from the U.S. Capitol to the Washington Monument.

The Great American State Fair will feature main stage performances by legendary artists, and in the upcoming weeks, Freedom 250 will continue to announce more incredible performers, speakers, and participants.

The Great American State Fair will feature special screenings of the iconic films National Treasure and National Treasure: Book of Secrets, alongside family-friend-

ly and educational programming, including Tuttle Twins and the interactive American Journey Experience.

The event will also include special appearances and programming by representatives of the National Medal of Honor Museum, nationally recognized health and wellness leaders, and some of America’s top innovators, who will participate in immersive educational and interactive experiences.

In addition to live programming, the event will include:

- A 110-foot Ferris wheel overlooking the National Mall
- The newly refurbished Smithsonian National Carousell
- State and territory showcases from across America
- Robotics and autonomous vehicle demonstrations
- Augmented reality activations and innovation exhibits
- CEO and innovator-led conversations and demonstrations

A popular stop for Bell County visitors is the Nation-

Continued on Page 10

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al Mounted Warrior Museum at Fort Hood. From the earliest days of the American Revolution to the wars on terrorism, mounted infantry and cavalry have played a significant role in US military success. The new museum honors the history and importance of soldiers on horseback and in tanks.

According to an economic impact study conducted by Texas A&M Central Texas, the museum is expected to draw up to 377,000 visitors annually. Two-thirds of

those visitors are expected to be from outside the Bell County area.

“This museum is having a huge impact on Central Texas businesses,” said Lt. Gen. (Retired) Paul Funk, former commanding general of III Corp and Fort Hood. “It’s going to bring in a lot of people who will spend money in our communities.”

Also locally, there will be fireworks extravaganzas on July 4 in Belton and Temple.



# FRANK MINOSKY NAMED BELTON 4TH OF JULY PARADE GRAND MARSHAL



The Belton Area Chamber of Commerce announced that the Grand Marshal of the Belton 4th of July Parade this year will be Frank Minosky.

The theme for this year's parade is "Celebrating 250 Years of the USA" with a special focus on honoring our military veterans, so it is fitting for a veteran servant leader in our community to serve as the Grand Marshal.

Retired Command Sergeant Major Frank Minosky came to Belton via assignment to Fort Hood, and thanks in no small part to his wife Joey, quickly made it his home, sinking deep roots and investing in our community to make it better.

Minosky had a second career with Workforce Solutions of Central Texas, with a special focus on the needs of veterans. He has also served our community in many other ways, including volunteering with the VFW, AUSA, Belton Planning and Zoning Commission, and City Council.

His work with the Belton Chamber over the past 20+ years has included serving on the Board of Directors, as Chair of the Military Relations Committee, and as Chair of the 4th of July Parade. He was named the 2005 Citizen of the Year, and in 2025 was honored with the Chamber's Legendary Impact Award.

Minosky has been a driving force in promoting the one-percen-

*Continued on Page 11*



ters luncheon on the last Friday of each month for veterans, and was instrumental in helping our Military Relations Committee thrive. He helped us connect and collaborate with our Fort Hood neighbors and veteran community.

“We are excited to celebrate the 250-year anniversary of our country with our theme for the parade this year,” stated Randy Pittenger, President/CEO of the Belton Area Chamber of Commerce. “Frank Minosky is a great representative, not only of our community, but also of the honor and appreciation our veterans are due.”

The annual parade serves as the centerpiece of a week-long 4th of July celebration in Belton that will start with a Downtown Street Party on the Courthouse Square on Saturday, June 27.

The 4th of July will be full of festivities, including the Patriotic Program, Parade (starting at 9:00 a.m. again this year), Festival on Nolan Creek in Liberty Park featuring the Rev, White & Blue Car Show and the 5th Annual Hot Dog Eating Contest, Family Night of the 102nd annual PRCA Rodeo at the Huntington Bank Expo (formerly known as the Cadence Bank Center, and more commonly known as the Bell County Expo), then finishing the day with the Backyard Party at Schoepf’s Concert and Fireworks.

For more information about these events, visit the website at [www.beltonchamber.com](http://www.beltonchamber.com), call 254-939-3551, or email [info@beltonchamber.com](mailto:info@beltonchamber.com).



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# FOURTH OF JULY RODEO CELEBRATING A SECOND CENTURY OF THRILLS

Riding, roping and wrangling — the 102<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Belton Fourth of July rodeo will bust out of the shoot July 2 at the Cadence Bank Center(Huntington Bank Expo). The popular rodeo will continue July 3 and 4.

Tickets for the rodeo are on sale — reserved seats or general admission tickets can be purchased online at [Belton-Chamber.com](http://Belton-Chamber.com), at [cadencebankcenter.com](http://cadencebankcenter.com) or at the Cadence Bank Center business office from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

In addition to the regularly contested PRCA and WPRA events featuring the top cowboys and cowgirls from across the country, each night of the rodeo will also feature the always popular Mutton Bustin’ with children hanging on to ride sheep for as long as they can.

Each night of the rodeo features a different theme, with opening night on Thursday, July 2, being Hometown Heroes Night, honoring local emergency responders and educators. Friday, July 3, is Military Appreciation Night, featuring a special patriotic opening and oath of enlistment ceremony.

The Saturday, July 4, rodeo also will feature the wildly



*Continued on Page 15*

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popular Stick Horse Stampede at 6:30 p.m. and is Family Night, where kids 12 and under will be admitted free with a paid adult general admission ticket.

Children will be invited to lead their stick horses onto the rodeo arena floor prior to the rodeo in a memorable and photo worthy experience. As an extra bonus, kids 12 and younger get in free with a paid adult general admission ticket on Family Night Saturday.

Here's a bit of Belton rodeo history:

Ellis White Holland Sr. is credited with producing the first Belton Fourth of July Rodeo in 1924, and he continued on the rodeo committee until 1940.

Holland leased bucking horses from the Texas State Penitentiary during those early years. He was a rancher and businessman, and was inducted into the Texas Rodeo Cowboy

Hall of Fame as an honorary member. He also was inducted into the Texas Rodeo Cowboy Hall of Fame.

That first rodeo was held at the Penelope Street Hill arena in a simple, dry, rocky open space that offered just enough room for aspiring cowboys to show off their skills.

Following World War II, a new rodeo arena was built in what is now Liberty Park to accommodate the growing crowds. Once the huge arena, wooden bleachers, stock pens, and chutes were built, Belton began to draw top professional cowboys.

The rodeo grew to the point that additional bleachers were stacked with metal seats. The show continued to increase in size.

*Continued on Page 16*

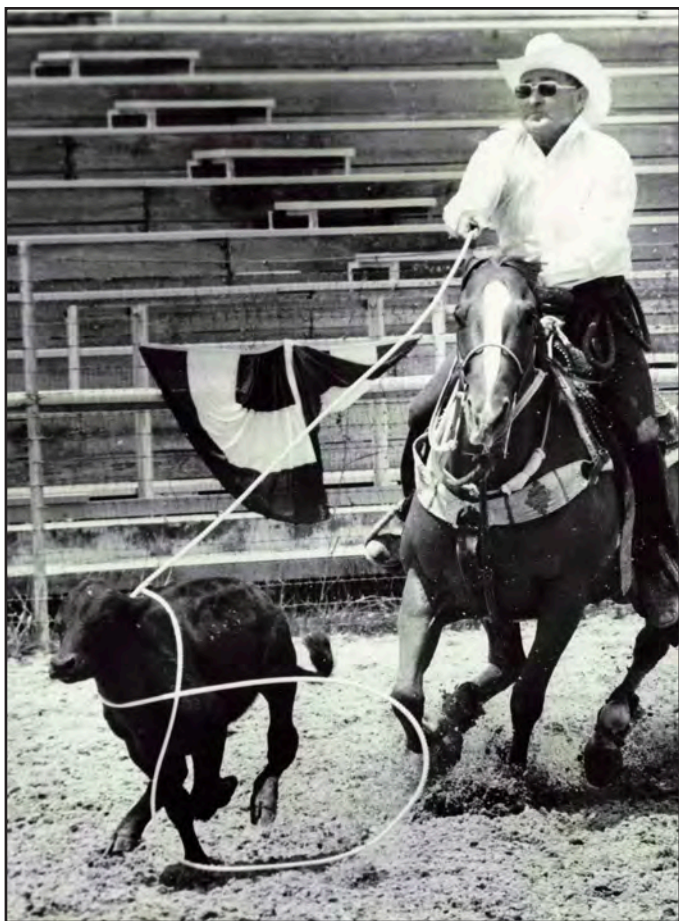


In the 1980s the Belton Area Chamber of Commerce moved the rodeo to the new Bell County Expo Center — now known as Cadence Bank Center(Huntington Bank Expo) — where fans come from far and wide to enjoy quality family entertainment in addition to PRCA and WPRA Rodeo events.

### Here's a look at some of the rodeo events:

#### Bull Riding

Bull riding, which is intentionally climbing on the back of a 2,000-pound bull, emerged from the fearless nature of the cowboy. Bull riding is dangerous and predictably exciting, de-



manding intense physical toughness, supreme mental toughness and courage, but the accolades and the respect that comes from bull riding are great, and the stories are lifelong. It's one of rodeo's most popular events worldwide.

The bull rider may use only one hand to stay aboard during the eight-second ride. To stay aboard, a rider grasps a flat braided rope, which is wrapped around the bull's chest just behind the front legs and over its withers.

Every bull is unique in its bucking habits. A bull may dart to the left, then juke back to the right and then rear back. Some bulls spin or continuously circle during the eight-second ride.

If the cowboy touches the bull or himself with his free hand, he receives no score. To stay aboard the bull, a rider grasps a flat braided rope, which is wrapped around the bull's chest just behind the front legs and over its withers.

#### Bareback Riding

To stay aboard the horse, a bareback rider uses rigging made of leather and constructed to meet PRCA safety specifications. The rigging is placed atop the horse's withers and secured with a cinch. As the bronc and rider burst from the chute, the rider must have both spurs touching the horse's shoulders until the horse's feet hit the ground after the initial move from the chute, or what is called "marking out."

As the bronc bucks, the rider pulls his knees up, rolling his spurs up the horse's shoulders. Making a qualified ride and earning a money-winning score requires more than just strength.

A bareback rider is judged on his spurring technique, the degree to which his toes remain turned out while he is spurring and his willingness to take whatever might come during his ride. It's the cowboy way.

#### Saddle Bronc Riding

Saddle bronc riding is rodeo's classic event, both a complement and contrast to the wilder spectacles of bareback rid-



ing and bull riding.

To properly mark out his horse, the saddle bronc rider must have both heels touching the animal above the point of its shoulders when it makes its first jump from the chute.

While a bareback rider has a rigging to hold, the saddle bronc rider has only a thick rein attached to his horse's halter. Using one hand, the cowboy tries to stay securely seated in his saddle.

Judges score the horse's bucking action, the cowboy's control of the horse and the cowboy's spurring action. While striving to keep his toes turned outward, the rider spurs from the points of the horse's shoulders to the back of the saddle.

### Barrel Racing

Barrel racing has no judges, no subjective points of view. Time declares the winners.

Barrel racing has four points of focus: one woman, three barrels, a horse and a stopwatch. When the racer enters the arena, an electronic eye starts the clock. The clock is stopped the instant the horse completes the pattern.

The horse is ridden as quickly as possible around a cloverleaf-shaped course of three barrels. At the end of the performance, once all of the racers have finished their runs, the clock is the one and only judge.

### Steer Wrestling

With the world record sitting at 2.4 seconds, steer wrestling is the quickest event in rodeo.

The objective of the steer wrestler, aka a "bulldogger," is to use strength and technique to wrestle a steer to the ground as quickly as possible. The bulldogger starts on horseback in a box. The steer gets a head start, and when the steer reaches the advantage point, the barrier is released, and the bulldogger takes off.

When the cowboy reaches the steer, he slides down and off the right side of his galloping horse, hooks his right arm around the steer's right horn, grasps the left horn with his left hand and, using strength and leverage, slows the animal and wrestles it to the ground. The steer is considered down when he's on his side with all four feet pointing the same direction.

### Calf Roping (Tie-Down Roping)

The mounted cowboy starts from a box after the calf receives a head start that is determined by the length of the arena. One end of a breakaway rope barrier is looped around the calf's neck and stretched across the open end of the box.

When the calf reaches its advantage point, the barrier is released. The horse is trained to come to a stop as soon as the cowboy throws his loop and catches the calf. The cowboy then dismounts, sprints to the calf and throws it by hand, which is defined as flanking.

After the calf is flanked, the roper ties any three legs together with a pigging string. While the cowboy ties, his horse pulls back hard enough to eliminate any slack in the rope. When the roper finishes tying the calf, he throws his hands in the air as a signal that the run is complete.

### Team Roping

Team roping, the only true team event in ProRodeo, requires close cooperation and timing between two highly skilled ropers – a header and a heeler – and their horses.

Similar to tie-down ropers and steer wrestlers, team ropers start from the boxes on each side of the chute from which the steer enters the arena. The steer gets a head start, and when he reaches his advantage point, the barrier is released, and the header takes off in pursuit, with the heeler trailing slightly further behind.

The header ropes first and must make one of the three legal catches on the steer – around both horns, around one horn and the head or around the neck.

After the header makes his catch, he turns the steer to the left and exposes the steer's hind legs to the heeler. The heeler then attempts to rope both hind legs. After the cowboys catch the steer, the clock is stopped when there is no slack in their ropes and their horses face one another.





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# FIREWORKS AND FUN ON FOURTH

**By David Stone**  
*The Belton Journal*

America's 250th birthday bash is upon us, and Bell County residents will have several opportunities to watch the celebration explode over Belton, Temple and Fort Hood.

Beltonians can head to Schoepf's BBQ — 702 E Central — for fireworks and a concert by Sprung. Gates will open at 6 pm and fireworks will begin after sunset.

Temple will host its annual H-E-B Fourth of July Fun Fest celebration and fireworks show at 7 p.m. at Crossroads Park — 1020 Research Parkway.

In addition to fireworks, Belton's Fourth of July Celebration will include many activities. With more than 30,000 people expected to line the streets, a 1.5 mile parade will run down Main Street from the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor to the Bell County Courthouse, then east on Central and north on Birdwell to the Belton Police Memorial.

Following the parade, the crowd will head to Liberty Park for food, crafts, games, a petting zoo and a static display of military and first responder equipment. Live entertainment will be on stage at the gazebo.

The three-night PRCA Rodeo is held July 2-4 at the Cadence Bank Center, an indoor, air-conditioned facility with a capacity for 5,900 rodeo attendees. Cowboys from around the country descend on the only PRCA Rodeo in Texas during this holiday weekend, making it a must-see event.

Belton's celebration kicks off with a downtown street party on June 27.

The City of Temple is hosting its 28th H-E-B Fun Fest & Fireworks Show on July 4 at Crossroads Park, and according to Lauren Spears, Temple's public relations specialist, details of the event are still being finalized.

"Gates will open at 6 p.m. and close at 8 p.m.," she said. "Parking is free, but it is first-come, first-served. Traffic delays are expected as showtime approaches, so early arrival is recommended. The event's opening ceremony is slated to start around 6:45 p.m. and will include the Pledge of Allegiance and daytime fireworks. Groove Knights will take the stage at 7 p.m., and the fireworks finale will start at 9:30 p.m."

"DJs will be on-site at various locations, local vendors will have items for sale, the Recreation Station will host activities and there will be a foam bubble/inflatable games area," Spears said.

Guests are encouraged to bring blankets, picnic baskets and lawn chairs to enjoy the fireworks show. The display will last approximately 20 minutes and can be viewed from Crossroads Park and nearby

*Continued on Page 20*



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neighborhoods. Admission is free and open to the public.

As America approaches its landmark 250th anniversary, the III Armored Corps is inviting Central Texans to join in a historic celebration. The “Phantom Warriors” have officially announced the III Armored Corps and Central Texas Freedom Ball 2026, a premier event dedicated to honoring two-and-a-half centuries of American liberty and the soldiers who have defended it. Scheduled for Thursday, July 2, 2026, the gala will be held at the Killeen Civic & Conference

Center on Thursday, July 2.

Under the theme “America at 250 — A Nation Preserved by the Army,” the evening serves as a formal tribute to the service, sacrifice, and enduring legacy of the U.S. Army since its inception.

The Freedom Ball is not just for the military; it is a community-wide invitation. The event organizers emphasize that the public is encouraged to attend alongside soldiers, veterans, and military families. The evening, running from 5 p.m. to 11 p.m., promises a night of military pageantry, tradition, and inspiration.



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# MUTTON BUSTIN' AT THE BELTON 4TH OF JULY RODEO

One of the most popular highlights of the annual Belton 4<sup>th</sup> of July Rodeo is a very special event for the youngest participants, Mutton Bustin'. Always a crowd pleaser, seeing these young cowgirls and cowboys ride sheep for as long as they can hold on while the animal runs and jumps around the rodeo arena is an experience that brings the loudest cheers.

Each night of the rodeo features up to 15 riders, all vying to be the champion who scores the highest. Scoring is based on the length of time they stay on the sheep, as well as the judges' assessment of their overall ride. Just like the cowboys who ride the bulls and bucking broncs, the sheep vary in their speed and jumping abilities. Some riders can hold on for only a brief time while others have more extended rides, adding to the excitement.

Children ages 4-7 weighing under 55 pounds are eligible to sign up in advance for this exciting event. Each year there is high demand for the limited slots

*Continued on Page 22*



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available. Participants receive tickets to attend the rodeo as well as a commemorative Mutton Bustin' shirt. Sign-ups this year will be on Thursday, June 11.

Some children are understandably nervous about their first ride but soon find out the thrill of the ride is worth overcoming their fear. Safety is a high priority for every rodeo event, including Mutton Bustin', so the young riders are outfitted with protective equipment including a helmet and vest.

"We always look forward to the sign-up event to see the enthusiasm our youngest fans bring to the rodeo," stated Randy Pittenger, Belton Area Chamber President/CEO. "Then on each night of the rodeo, the anticipation of their big ride brings out many cameras from supportive family members and friends. Just like our other rodeo participants, their event might only last a few seconds but the memories they make will last a lifetime."

Mutton Bustin' is one of many events at the rodeo, featuring family friendly entertainment. This will be the 102<sup>nd</sup> consecutive year for the annual Belton 4<sup>th</sup> of July Rodeo, held July 2-4 in the air-conditioned Huntington Bank Expo (formerly known as the Cadence Bank Center, and more commonly known as the Bell County Expo). Opening night on Thursday, July 2 is Hometown Heroes Night, honoring local first re-

sponders, healthcare, and education professionals. Friday, July 3 is Military Appreciation Night. Closing out the rodeo is Family Night on Saturday, July 4 that includes the KPA Engineers Stick Horse Stampede.

For more information about the rodeo and other Belton 4<sup>th</sup> of July Celebration events, visit the website at [www.beltonchamber.com](http://www.beltonchamber.com), call 254-939-3551,



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# CELEBRATION A BIG PART OF BELTON HISTORY

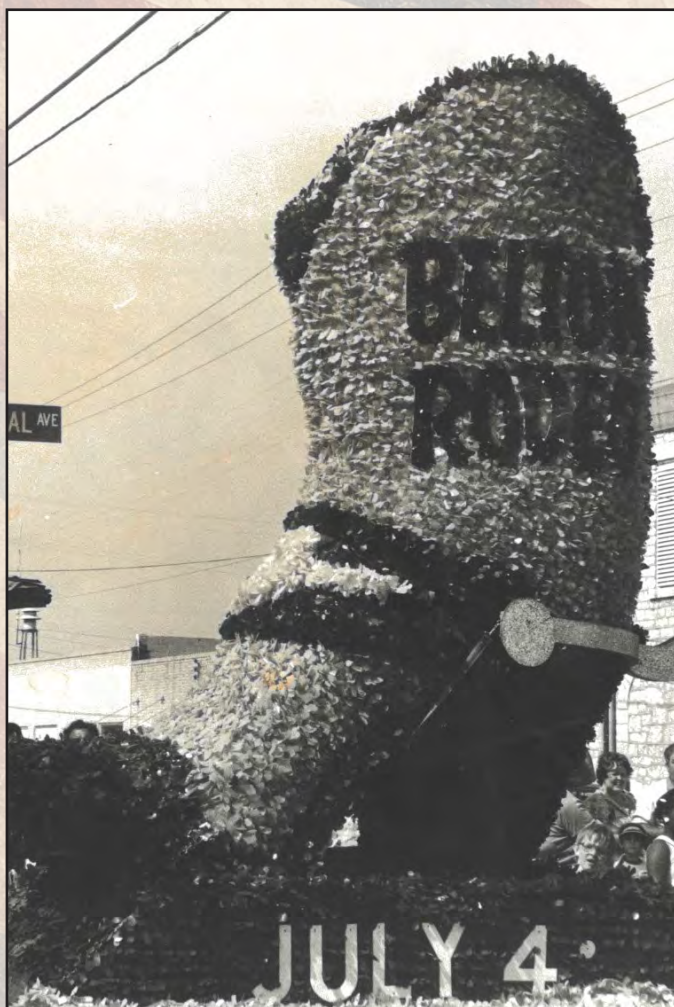
By David Stone

The Belton Journal

People from all over Texas and beyond will head to Belton in early July to celebrate Independence Day. They have been celebrating here since 1852, and there's no sign of a let-up. The celebration became an annual tradition in 1919. Many parades were dedicated to local veterans of various wars including Confederate veterans, members of the AEF (American Expeditionary Forces) of World War I, and the sacrifice of the soldiers of World War II. The week-long celebration continues to draw thousands of spectators and brings families back year after year to continue the tradition. The parade of 1924 was featured on the front page of the Belton Journal and praised as a "parade of extraordinary beauty and length and one of the most beautiful spectacles ever witnessed in Central Texas." It was estimated that a crowd of 25,000 viewed the floats which were created by farmers, business-



es, churches, schools, and fraternal orders. Bicycles, horseback riders, ancient vehicles, and comic floats were among the other entries. Cochran, Blair and Potts won the prize for business float; the Christian Church was awarded first place for organization float. The farm display floats included the Baylor College Poultry Farm decked out with chickens of all ages. The Ku Klux Klan float bore eight knights and was escorted by four horsemen in costume. Also that year, political candidates followed in their cars with Albert Bonds, a candidate for sheriff, winning first place in the candidates cars. W. C. Polk's car was called "The Tin Lizzie." The Belton High School Band furnished the music for the parade, and the National Guard lent a stirring military presence. Belton Fourth of July celebrations generally begin with a kick-off barbecue meal in Yettie Polk Park during the week. On July 4, a patriotic program takes place at 9 a.m. at the courthouse. The parade begins promptly at 10 a.m., forming largely at the parking lot at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor. Over the years, the route has varied, but now makes its way down Main Street starting at 10th Ave., then south to Central Ave., turning east and finishing at Birdwell. In years past, the parade was followed with political speeches at the park. Nowadays attendees flood to the park and Nolan Creek to indulge in favorite foods, arts and crafts, and water activities. An integral part of the festivities is the Old Fiddlers Contest at the bandstand in the park, with prizes awarded to the best fiddlers in various age categories. In July 2000, to celebrate 150 years of the parade, the theme was "Mom, Dad, and Apple Pie" to express patriotism, nostalgia, and traditional family values. Gov. George W. Bush, First Lady Laura Bush, and Commanding General III Corps and Fort Hood, Leon LaPorte, were the parade marshals. Governor Bush and General LaPorte spoke briefly at the patriotic program



Continued on Page 25



July 4, 1926 Parade

Delton, Texas

prior to the parade. In 1982 the parade made its first appearance on television with a live broadcast from the courthouse lawn, thanks to KCEN-TV. Today the parade is also live-streamed on the internet. It gained national attention in 2008 when USA Today named Belton's 4th of July Parade as one of the country's "Top Ten Places to Fly Your Flag on the 4th."

The rodeo became a part of the celebration in 1924. Originally the rodeo was a one-day event with ten entries in each event and held at the football field on South Penelope between East Avenues C and E. According to Berneta Peeples, the bucking broncos were rented, and it was advertised that anyone who had a wild horse that needed to be saddle-broke was welcome to bring it. One year, a horse suffered from heat exhaustion and died. The Chamber of Commerce used all of the rodeo profits to pay for it. The cattle were purchased just for the rodeo and later sold at a reduced price. By the 1930s, the event moved to the football field at Confederate Park, and the Belton rodeo became a member of the Cowboys Turtle Association (later the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association). The rodeo was a very popular event, and fol-

lowing World War II, the Chamber of Commerce built a new rodeo arena in Confederate Park. Over the years as attendance at the rodeo increased, it was moved to the Bell County Expo Center in order to accommodate the large crowds.

In the 1990s Marvin Crow wrote a column for the Belton Journal entitled "Crow's Cafe" in which he reminisced about days gone by. At one time Crow's Cafe was part of the Greyhound Bus Station located near the post office. Crow told of one Independence Day celebration during the war that was rather humorous. When the parade started, the employees of Crow's stood in the street and watched the parade "until the horses came down the hill." Then they went inside the cafe and began cooking hamburgers and chicken fried steak. During the war each Greyhound Bus schedule had five buses. All the buses had to stop outside town until the parade was over; then, within five minutes of each other, all ten buses rolled in to the bus station. All the buses were full with as many as 50 passengers per bus. Crow's special, "The Best 35 Cent Dinner in Texas" was in demand as well as restrooms at all the nearby gas stations!



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# 4TH OF JULY FESTIVAL ON NOLAN CREEK IN LIBERTY PARK

The annual 4<sup>th</sup> of July Festival on Nolan Creek will be held in Liberty Park again this year following the parade. Each year following the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Parade, thousands of visitors enjoy a variety of vendors, food trucks, music, games and displays at the Festival on Nolan Creek.

Liberty Park is located near the Belton Christian Youth Center (BCYC) on Veterans Way. Two years ago, the festival was moved downstream from Yettie Polk Park to help accommodate more space for vendors and the Rev, White & Blue Car Show, as well as being the original area of the historic Belton Rodeo Grounds.

Prior to the opening of the Bell County Expo in 1987, the annual Belton 4<sup>th</sup> of July Rodeo was held at the old rodeo grounds where BCYC is currently located. Many people remember Liberty Park being the location for the Festival on Nolan Creek prior to moving to Yettie Polk Park for many years.

In years past, there was a low water crossing behind the Bell County Appraisal District office that was used to provide easy access to the park from the downtown area. Last year, the Belton Chamber and City of Belton jointly purchased a tem-

porary pedestrian bridge to cross Nolan Creek, providing easy access from the parade route to Liberty Park and the Festival.

“We are excited about this wonderful Belton tradition as we celebrate ‘Celebrating 250 Years of the USA’ as our parade theme, then continue the day of family fun with the Festival on Nolan Creek in Liberty Park,” stated Randy Pittenger, Belton Area Chamber President/CEO. “Many have commented that they recall wonderful memories of attending the Festival under the shade of trees in beautiful Liberty Park.”

Attractions and entertainment for the Festival on Nolan Creek in Liberty Park will include the return of the Hot Dog Eating Contest at Noon, the annual Rev, White & Blue Car Show, static display of military equipment from Fort Hood, the Dr. Watts Cooling Tent, live music performed at the pavilion, and dozens of food trucks and vendors.

The Hot Dog Eating Contest returns after a break last year, and is in its 5<sup>th</sup> year sponsored by High5HotDogs. Registration is open for both children and adult contestants, with great prize packages available for the winners who can eat the most hot dogs in 3 three minutes.

The Carnival will not be available this year, however,

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plenty of fun will be available for kids of all ages, including petting zoo, games, and activities.

The 4<sup>th</sup> of July will be full of activities and events, including the Patriotic Program, Parade, and Festival on Nolan Creek in Liberty Park, Family Night of the 102<sup>nd</sup> annual PRCA Rodeo at the Huntington Bank Expo (formerly known as the Cadence Bank Center, and more commonly known as the Bell County Expo), and then close out with the Backyard Party at Schoepf's Concert and Fireworks, featuring Sprung and Jared Johnson prior to the fireworks show. The concert is a free, non-ticketed event, open to the public thanks to our sponsors, but seating is only available with advance reserva-

tions for reserved picnic tables.

For more information about these events, visit the website at [www.beltonchamber.com](http://www.beltonchamber.com), call 254-939-3551, or email [info@beltonchamber.com](mailto:info@beltonchamber.com).



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# SHOWING OUR PATRIOTISM THROUGH THE BELTON LIONS CLUB FLAG PROGRAM

It's encouraging to see the patriotism of so many in our community as you proudly fly the flag of the United States of America! ~ *Belton Lions Club*

Every year the Belton Lions Club encourages residents to sign up for its year-round Flag Program.

The program provides homeowners with a mounted American flag for \$30 a year, including the flag, pole, and ground sleeve. The club maintains and replaces flags as needed.

"We currently have about 147 flags out," said Karen Stagner, club secretary. The club actively looks to add more each year.

The program originally involved volunteers placing and removing flags on specific holidays. In time, the club shifted to a "perpetual" model where flags stay up year-round, provided they're lit at night in accordance with flag code. Replacements are handled by the club upon request.

"Wouldn't it be great to drive into your street and see it lined with flags?" said Stagner. "It shows pride and also supports everything we're able to do in Belton."

Participation has decreased by over 50 homes in the last few years, according to the club. To counter that, members are reaching out to local HOAs and considering door-to-door block

walking to reconnect with residents and grow the program.

"We've had a lot of people move in and out. When that happens, sometimes the flag just sits there or disappears," Stagner said. "We want the new folks to know this program exists."

While the Flag Program is the focus for the summer, it's also one of the club's key fundraisers. The Belton Lions Club uses proceeds to support children with disabilities, underserved families, and various community programs.

This includes collecting eyeglasses for the Texas Lions Eyeglass Recycling Center, sponsoring students with two annual scholarships, funding the Lions Pavilion and accessible playground at Heritage Park, and supporting the Texas Lions Camp, a free summer camp for children with physical, intellectual, and medical conditions.

The club also helps with Project Heartbeat's Angel Tree program for Belton ISD students, holiday food baskets for families with special needs, and Back-to-School with God, an event in July at Yettie Polk Park where kids receive haircuts, eye exams, and free hot dogs.

They also host Christmas with Santa, a sensory-friendly celebration for special needs families that includes therapy dogs, gift bags, and support booths from local organizations.

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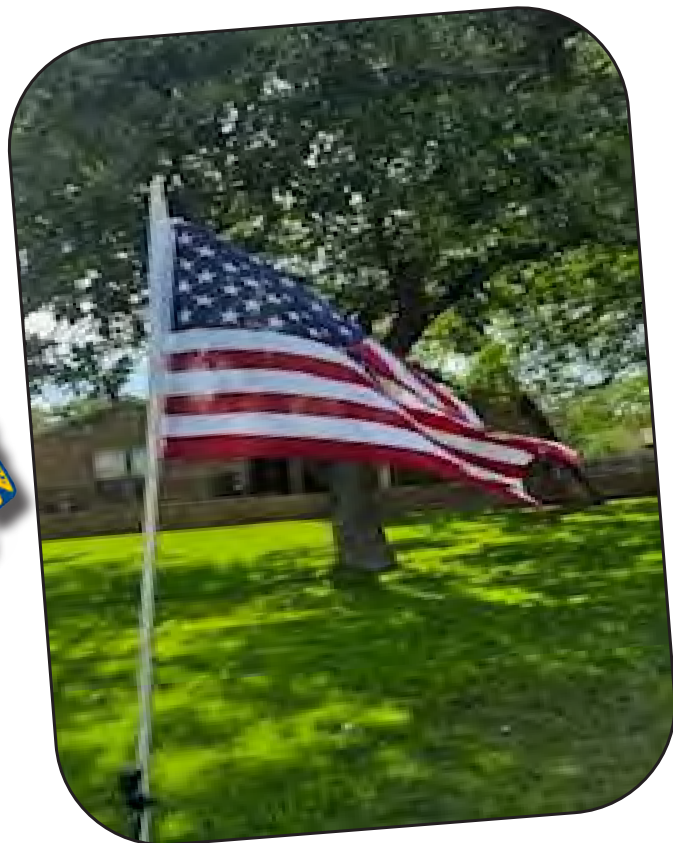
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Another major annual fundraiser is the “Captain D Dash for Sight” 5K on October 3 at Heritage Park, a pirate-themed event.

The club also organizes community efforts in partnership with groups like the Temple-Belton Lady Lions. On May 22, 2024, they helped deliver food and drinks to recovery crews working across Morgan’s Point after the severe storm.

“That’s the reason we do fundraisers — without our supporters and sponsors, there’s a lot we wouldn’t be able to do,” Stagner said.

For more information, visit [beltonlionsclub.com](http://beltonlionsclub.com).





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# HIGH5HOTDOGS WILL HOST 5TH ANNUAL HOT-DOG-EATING CONTEST

By **Shalee Corey-Wiebe**

*The Belton Journal*

High5HotDogs will be hosting their annual hot-dog-eating contest on July 4th after the Belton parade, starting at 12 p.m. at Liberty Park. There will be two separate contests with ten contestants each, one for kids ages ten to fifteen, and one for adults, with the kids competing for free due to a generous as possible, bun and all, within the span of three minutes.

Kid prizes this year include a Nintendo Switch Lite and a Spare Time bowling party for six, with more prizes still to be announced. All kid participants will receive some kind of goody. Adult prizes currently include a weed-eater/leaf-blower combo and a \$200 dollar gift card to a local tattoo shop.

Jennifer Joy Martin, owner of High5HotDogs, has done this contest four times before, with this year being the fifth. She started her business in 2019 shortly before she joined the chamber. She wondered why there was no hot-dog-eating contest, when Randy, president of the Belton Chamber, suggested that she was the perfect person to do it, and so she did.

Jennifer said about the hot-dog-eating contest, "It's popular, it's fun, and it's affordable." She said, "If they do it in New York, we can do it in Belton, Texas."



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The event is not only fun, but also supports the community. There will be an item raffled off that supports the local nonprofit, Priceless Beginnings, which helps victims of domestic violence. It's something that hits close to home for Jennifer, "I've been through it myself." She said, "it's something that means a lot to me."

The deadline to sign up as a contestant is June 29th. Information can be found on the High5HotDogs facebook page, as well as Jennifer's personal facebook page. Those who want to sponsor, sign up themselves, or sign up someone else can contact Jennifer directly or contact the Belton Chamber of Commerce.



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# FOURTH OF JULY BACKYARD CONCERT AND FIREWORKS SHOW AT SCHOEPF'S BBQ

By Michele Weisman

The Belton Journal

A hometown event since 2009, the backyard concert at Schoepf's BBQ has been a way to continue the Fourth of July celebration into the evening. It is hosted by the Belton Area Chamber of Commerce through partnerships, sponsors, and INDECO, which makes the fireworks possible.

Schoepf said it's important for this community event to have bands from the area for the hometown feel. He said that between sound, production, and fireworks, this event is not possible without the support of vendors.

This is a free event for general admission. Reservations for VIP and picnic table seating, while still available, are made on Schoepf's BBQ website under Events.

The gates open at 6 p.m. with live music starting at 7 p.m.

The evening opens with country music by local Jared Johnson. The band Sprung, also with roots in Belton, is headlining with cover songs from the 80s and 90s. Fireworks follow.

Schoepf said, "The Fourth of July is one of the busiest days of the year. We'll have barbecue until we sell out or eight p.m."

The Texas Country Music Association has awarded Schoepf's BBQ the Live Music Venue of the Year. They also received an honorable mention in Texas Monthly's 2025 list of the best BBQ joints in Texas.

To find out more about free admission or reserving a picnic table or VIP seating, visit [schoepfsbbq.com/ourevents/](http://schoepfsbbq.com/ourevents/).








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# THE 4TH OF JULY PARADE CELEBRATED OVER 100 YEARS IN BELTON

Belton is a community known for its historical heritage, including being located on the Chisholm Trail and being the home of the oldest continuously operating department store in Texas: Cochran, Blair & Potts. It is also known as a community that values tradition, so it is no surprise that history and traditions around the 4<sup>th</sup> of July are treasured and deeply followed by many who live in, return, or travel to Belton for the holiday.

The Belton parade is known as one of the longest running and largest annual 4<sup>th</sup> of July parades in Texas, filled with tradition and beloved by generations of families. Many people proudly recount the number of years they have either been in or watched the parade in Belton, often from the same viewing location.

Traditions surrounding the 4<sup>th</sup> of July in Belton date back over 100 years, with the first recorded parade held as early as 1852, becoming an annual event in 1919. Fol-

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lowing World War I, patriotism and community spirit was high, and the local farming economy was growing, giving people cause for celebration.

Early on it was community leaders – the wives of local business owners who organized and planned the parade. Later on, the Belton Area Chamber of Commerce has taken the lead in producing the parade in partnership with the City of Belton staff and an army of community volunteers.

In 1924 the Belton Journal reported that over 25,000 people lined the streets of Belton for “a parade of extraordinary beauty and length and one of the most beautiful spectacles ever witnessed in Central Texas.”

The parade had its first live television broadcast on KCEN in 1982, continued annually on either KCEN or KWTX as it is currently. For decades and only ending recently, the parade was also broadcast live on KTEM radio for those tuning in to hear commentary about the parade.

In recent years, internet live-streaming has enabled people across the country and around the world to tune in to see their favorite parade entries. Reports are regularly shared of grandparents watching from far away to see their grandchildren in the parade.

Many notable community and military leaders have served as Parade Grand Marshal over the years. Then

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Governor and presidential candidate George W. Bush served as Grand Marshal in 2000, and walked the parade route with his wife, Laura Bush, accompanied by a significant security detail.

After celebrating the 100-year anniversary of consecutive parades in 2019, the parade was canceled in 2020 due to the pandemic and Governor's restrictions on public events, with an official virtual parade and numerous neighborhood parades helping to fill the void. The parade returned with enthusiasm in 2021, with a renewed appreciation for what was always expected.

Participants in the parade have historically included Fort Hood soldiers, including the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Horse Detachment, Belton ISD student groups, horse groups, car clubs, fire trucks from throughout the area, and numerous churches, non-profit organizations, and businesses. This is not just a Belton tradition, as elected officials, entries, and spectators from the surrounding area have also made it a priority to participate.

The BHS Marching 100 has performed in the parade for as long as anyone can remember, with an added component in recent years of the M100 Alumni Band performing at the Courthouse prior to the parade at the Patriotic Program. This event at the Courthouse has served as a formal start to the parade since the beginning.

Many take the competition for parade awards seriously and proudly display their awards for years. CGI has made it an annual quest to earn the "Best in Show" award, while others eagerly anticipate the theme announcement so they can plan for their float decorations. Other entries are timeless classics, including the much-enjoyed Long Family Wagon Train.

Each year has a special theme, often depicted by decorations on floats. In recent years, the theme has focused on its historical significance including "Celebrating 100 years in Belton" (2019), "Celebrating 100 Years of the Belton Rodeo" (2024), and "Celebrating 175 years of Bell County" (2025). Other themes have focused on community relationships, including "Hometown Heroes" (2021), "Celebrating Community Connections" (2022), and "Better Together" (2023).

Many parades over the years have featured military veterans, and while the theme this year is "Celebrating 250 Years of the USA" in conjunction with the national focus this year, the parade will also have a special emphasis on honoring those who have served in our military, our veterans. The Grand Marshal will be CSM (retired) Frank Minosky, a long-time leader of veterans in our community.

As the number of entries has grown, with over 150 an-



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nually, the parade route was initially much shorter, starting on Main Street around 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, wrapping around the Courthouse and ending in Yettie Polk Park. Over the years, the parade route and length have been extended to accommodate growth in number of participants and spectators.

Currently the parade staging area uses the streets surrounding the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, with the parade route starting at the UMHB main entrance at 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue, heading south on Main Street toward the Bell County Courthouse, turning east on Central Avenue, then turning north on Birdwell Street, ending after the Police Memorial.

The full 1½ mile parade route is filled with cheering spectators, many of whom gather in the same location their family has viewed the parade for generations. Many people begin saving their cherished viewing location by parking a truck or trailer, or setting up a tent canopy or chairs in their chosen spot. Others arrive extra early to find their viewing spot, and some even spend the night on the parade route as a tradition.

In 2008, USA Today recognized Belton as one of the top 10 places to celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, noting that “Belton’s parade is a true celebration of patriotism and the family, with a Texas flavor!” With the many traditions developed and continued for well over 100 years, one thing is certain, the traditions will continue!



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Originally known as the Stick Horse Grand Entry, the Stick Horse Stampede will take place on Saturday night, which is family night at the rodeo. This event is open to kids aged 12 and under, allowing them to experience the thrill of riding like a cowboy across the rodeo arena.



Children who wish to participate can line up in the front lobby from 6:15 to 6:30 p.m. on family night. No prior registration is required for this event. Additionally, kids aged 12 and under can enter for free with one paid adult ticket.

For those without a stick horse, one will be provided. After lining up, the kids will be escorted to the arena floor, where they will get to stampe into the arena alongside cowboys and rodeo clowns.

Children will have the opportunity to run, skip, or gallop onto the arena floor with their stick horses, giving them a true rodeo cowboy experience. In previous years, kids have had a blast running around the arena, while adhering to safety precautions as no animals are present during this event. Many children have creatively acted out their cowboy personas by making lasso-throwing motions and yelling “yeehaw” to entertain the onlookers.

This event also offers parents a wonderful chance to capture great photographs of their kids charging through the arena like cowboys.

The Stick Horse Stampede provides an opportunity for those aged 12 and under who didn’t get a chance to participate in Mutton Bustin’. Mutton Bustin’, another popular event at the rodeo, involves kids riding sheep for as long as they can. Due to its popularity, participation is limited, making the Stick Horse Stampede an excellent alternative for kids eager to join in on the rodeo fun.

Each night of the rodeo will also feature the much-loved Mutton Bustin’, which delights the crowds and offers plenty of chances for cheers and unforgettable photos.





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