

San Antonio Express-News

# Arts & Entertainment

## Celebrating cultures: More than 40 will be represented at Texas Folklife Festival



Express-News File Photo

Isaac Cardenas, of American Indians in Texas holds forth at the 2013 Texas Folklife Festival. The group again will showcase American Indian food and dance at the festival. This year, the group will offer an ear of corn and a pure buffalo burger.

SAN ANTONIO — A few years ago at the Texas Folklife Festival, a little girl asked American Indian Isaac Cardenas, “How do you live so long?”

Cardenas wasn't fazed. Instead of taking offense, the member of the Tap Pilam Coahuiltecan Nation explained how the American Indian culture continues to exist outside history books.

Cardenas, the director of programs for American Indians in Texas at the Spanish Colonial Missions, or AIT-SCM, said questions like these are more common than one would think.

"A lot of people don't know about our contributions," he said of the 20-year-old group that seeks to preserve and strengthen the American Indian community in South Texas. "People aren't aware there's a large urban Indian population here."

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The desire to spread knowledge and culture is what has brought groups such as AIT-SCM to the Texas Folklife Festival at the Institute of Texan Cultures since the celebration's start in 1972. More than 40 Texas cultures represented by some 250 groups will participate in the festival, which runs Saturday and Sunday on the institute grounds at HemisFair Park.

"In 1968 when the HemisFair was built, it was a really big time for San Antonio," Cardenas said. "I was 13, and watching the tower come up and seeing the exhibit was amazing."

Cardenas, who was born and raised in San Antonio, said he wanted to bring that same sense of wonder to the Folklife Festival when AIT-SCM became involved in 2006. By showcasing the dance and food of South and Central Texas, the group has made a name for itself as a regular contributor at the multicultural event.

The center brings 100 to 150 people to volunteer and participate in the festival. Cardenas said youth and elders are involved as well.

"The Native American Indian population needed to be represented, and as an agency, we had the means to do that," he said.



Courtesy Photo

*American Indians in tribal finery at a previous festival.*

Cardenas said he hopes festival attendees will enjoy a colorful menu of ingredients native to the area while they learn about modern American Indian culture.

For the first time this weekend, AIT-SCM will offer an ear of corn and a pure buffalo burger, a healthy alternative for those tired of run-of-the-mill beef. Fry-bread tacos with and without meat and a cactus tuna drink also will be for sale.

The group will offer three dishes using fry bread, a contemporary staple in American Indian food. Fry bread, similar to a tortilla, can be fried with other food, or eaten plain with sugar or honey.

“Any powwow you go to has this basic staple,” Cardenas said. “We try to provide the same type of taco meal with all native ingredients.”

Cardenas said the group's assigned section recently was moved to a plot of land where an Indian village once resided.

“We make our footprint historically by putting up a teepee and entertaining there,” he said.

A crafts area for children also will be available at the group's station, and two performances of traditional-type powwow dances will be on the main stage, Saturday at 1:30 p.m. and Sunday at 2:30 p.m.

"When people see us dance or eat some of our food, we are making connections," Cardenas said. "That's one of the things this festival gives: a big family of life."

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### *Folklife notes*

*Leaner fest: For the first time, the festival will be packed into two days, Saturday and Sunday. Last year's three-day event opened on a Friday. James Benavides, a senior communications specialist within the Institute of Texan Cultures, said a two-day festival will be easier on out-of-state participants and the more than 1,000 volunteers.*

*"We believe people who used to visit us on Friday night will come back Saturday and hopefully Sunday, too," he said.*

*Construction at the convention center was a major factor in the changes, which also means a smaller festival as well as a shorter one. The fest will shrink its footprint so that it begins at the ITC flagpoles, instead of closer to HemisFair Park.*

*The Spurs factor: Game 2 of the NBA Finals at the AT&T Center is scheduled to tip off at 7 p.m. Sunday, the festival's closing time. Last year's festival also had a conflict with Game 2; Benavides said they saw some of the crowd head out early to watch the game. He encouraged those people to come to Folklife on Saturday instead. "We're just as excited as the rest of San Antonio to watch the Spurs play," he added.*

*Breanna Kerr, Benjamin Olivo*

## Downtown blog item on Folklife

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