

MESA REPUBLIC

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Festival support is a rekindling of Mesa spirit

Mesa hasn't thrown a party this big in decades.

Today and Saturday, the city is shutting down Main Street through downtown for the inaugural Arizona Celebration of Freedom.

Residents are hungry for an event such as this. Not since the Rawhide Roundup of the 1940s and '50s —

where clean-shaven men grew beards, straight-laced ladies dressed as barmaids and everyone played roulette with fake money — have this many businesses, civic organizations and regular citizens clamored to get involved.

It's an extremely positive step for the city, which has struggled in recent years to recapture its community spirit.

Mesa has made multiple attempts to rally residents around celebrations, with varying success. But it wasn't until the Sertoma Club canceled its popular July Fourth fireworks display last year at Mesa Community College — a 50-year tradition — that more than a few niche groups accepted the call to party.

In just four months, volunteers from across the city have raised about \$180,000 in cash and another \$150,000



LATHAM PHOTOGRAPHY

Patrons crowd onto Mesa Arts Center's Shadow Walk during a recent outdoor event. Even more could attend this weekend's Arizona Celebration of Freedom.

in in-kind donations for this weekend's festival — which, of course, will include fireworks. Multiple sponsors, including Southwest Ambulance, KOOL-FM and the Chicago Cubs, stepped in with cash.

Walmart provided roughly \$10,000 in food. And more than 250 volunteers have signed up to set up tents, pick up trash

during the event and clean up afterward, some working as late as midnight.

As with MACFest, a weekly downtown arts festival, the city's involvement has been merely to facilitate planning among community groups. Organizers decided to move the fireworks downtown and build on the area's existing attractions.

About the festival

What do motorcycles, beer gardens, rock bands, fireworks, carnival games, veterans memorials and a Declaration of Independence that anyone can sign have in common? They'll all be at Mesa's inaugural Arizona Celebration of Freedom.

The festival is 6-10 p.m. today and Saturday in downtown Mesa. Parking and admission to the event are free.

Find more event information, including a complete schedule of performances, at arizonacelebrationoffreedom.com.

They offered free booth space to merchants and to groups that offered volunteers for the festival.

Churches, businesses, non-profits and citizens flooded the city with calls, asking how they could take part.

With plenty of places to keep cool, a variety of activities and everything except food and beer being free, the festival could attract quite a crowd.

Still, the greatest triumph comes from the number of folks who have come together to support Mesa — and each other.

Arizona driver lucky that not all of San Diego opposes SB 1070

My family and I went to San Diego over Memorial Day weekend for a soccer

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me a favor — go back to Arizona and tell all your friends that not everybody

lieve it is not the role of the Arizona Legislature to make immigration law nor is it the role of Arizona law-enforcement offi-

also deal with our long border with Canada and those who have overstayed their visas.

