

Events celebrating nation's military has become 'Fleet Year'

By **BRITISH BEHURIA**, The Daily Transcript

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A week of events was set up in 1997 to express the public's support for the nation's military services. The week came to be known as Fleet Week and its popularity rose over the years. To cater to the increase in interest, organizers spread the events out over weekends. This provided the opportunity for Fleet Week's events to link up with summer events like a San Diego symphony concert and fall events like the Coronado Speed Festival.

What has resulted is a celebration with more than 200,000 people expected to come to San Diego harbor to watch this year's Fleet Week's events kick off May 3, beginning with the Port of San Diego Sea and Air Parade and the Red Bull Air Race World Series.

"Fleet Week has become a complete year and that's terrific," said Steve Cushman, chair of Fleet Week San Diego. "The Holiday Bowl is not just about two games that take place in December and Fleet Week is just like that. Now, its Fleet Year, with activities going on all year round."



USS Rushmore

The opening weekend's events is the first time the Sea and Air Parade, and the Red Bull Air Race will take place on the same day. It provides an opportunity to bring spectators for both events to the harbor on the same day and thereby increase coverage and interest.

The Sea and Air Parade will involve six major Navy ships, Navy tactical air demonstrations and a simulated battle between tall ships.

The Red Bull Air Race is world-renowned and involves high-speed aircraft racing each other.

"You can see how it's all coming together," Cushman said. "The Red Bull Air Race will put San Diego worldwide on a television

standpoint. To have it as a kick-off event will allow all visitors and San Diegans to come down to Fleet Week. It's a win-win for everyone."

Fleet Week festivities will stretch to November and will include events such as Bands & Booms, a performance by the San Diego symphony, in July; a Viejas concert and a Padres baseball game in August; the Star Spangled Salute and the Coronado Speed Festival in September; and the Miramar Air Show and the Football Classic in October.

Fleet Week events also include various lunches and ceremonies throughout the year for military officers.

"These events are of vital importance to military families and San Diego does this better than any community I've ever seen," said Bill Hall, president of the Fleet Week board. "The Air Parade, Coronado Speed Festival, invitation to the Padres are examples of events that junior enlisted members of the military can take their families to for no or very low cost."

Other than being a way for the community to show appreciation to the nation's military services, Fleet Week has also provided a significant economic boost to San Diego over the years.



Hall said a lot of restaurants and hotels around the bay will profit over the weekend from the public coming down to the waterfront.

With San Diego ranked as one of the largest military bases in the world, Fleet Week events have been a huge success over the years. Tom Caughlan, executive director of Fleet Week San Diego, said he expects this year to be no different.

"It's a very exciting opportunity for everyone to come down to the bay and see ships and jet aircraft," Caughlan

said of the May 3 events. "Also, it's a chance to see the Red Bull Air races. All in all, it's a family-friendly day on the bay."

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