



NEWS Release

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ROCKPORT KICKS OFF SESQUICENTENNIAL WITH “SPIRIT OF ROCKPORT” PRESENTATION

ROCKPORT, TX – Mayor Patrick Rios will present the “Spirit of Rockport” Award to Lisa Gordon, Jessee Pilgrim and Mary Theisen, founders of the Aransas County PPE Sewing Group, at the City Council meeting on Tuesday, June 9th.

In less than two months, the three Rockport residents galvanized a community of sewers who provided more than 6,000 free masks for residents, nursing homes, government offices and businesses. Additionally, the group held four drive-by mask distribution events.

The "Spirit of Rockport" award was developed to recognize individuals and organizations which exemplify the unique spirit of Rockport and go above and beyond to make the community a better place. Each recipient will receive a limited-edition, commemorative medal that was designed specifically for the Sesquicentennial.

The City of Rockport is accepting nominations for the “Spirit of Rockport” award and presentations will be made at Council meetings. Additionally, the City seeks to recognize the oldest living resident and the first child to be born in 2020. Nomination forms are available on the Sesquicentennial page of the City’s web site <https://cityofrockport.com/722/Sesquicentennial>.

About Rockport

History

The Spanish first explored the area in 1519 with documentation of Aransas and Copano Bays by Captain Alonso Alvarez de Pineda. The earliest known inhabitants, the Karankawa Indians, were acknowledged by explorer Cabeza de Vaca in 1528. The French tried to settle here in the 1720's, with overwhelming resistance from the Karankawa Indians. The notorious pirate Jean Lafitte built a fort nearby in the early 1800's.

After the war between Spain and Mexico, all of what is now Texas was claimed by Mexico. General Zachary Taylor's army camped here in 1845 during the Mexican War. A special park and arboretum, which includes the tree under which he camped, is named in his honor.

The Town of Rockport was founded in 1867 and chartered as a city by the Texas Legislature in 1870. It became a thriving ranching, meat packing and shipping port. In 1871, Aransas County was formed from a portion of Refugio County and Rockport, which was then chartered as a city, became the county seat.

In 1840, East Coast entrepreneur George W. Fulton married Harriet Smith, daughter of powerful Republic-era politician Henry Smith. After Harriet's father died, Fulton turned Harriet's land inheritance on Aransas Bay into a ranching and meatpacking empire as part of the Coleman-Fulton Pasture Company. During the 1870s, the Fultons made their fortune shipping cattle tallow and hides between Rockport and New Orleans. To symbolize their success, they built a mansion called "Oakhurst," for the majestic windswept oaks that surrounded the property. The mansion was built over a period of three years, 1874–1877, and was the showplace of the town named for them.

Fulton was a man of many talents who achieved some success as an engineer and inventor as well as a ranching entrepreneur and promoter of the Texas Gulf Coast. Their bayside residence is a classic example of French Second Empire domestic architecture and is also a very personal and innovative dwelling. The historical significance of the house lies in its noteworthy architectural style, unique construction methods and advanced mechanical systems — which featured gas lighting, central heating and indoor plumbing with hot and cold running water — and includes the history of the Fulton family who built it and lived in it for 18 years.

Fulton Mansion passed through a succession of owners — a private residence, a restaurant, a backdrop for a trailer park and a recreation center — until its acquisition by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in 1976. In 2008, the mansion became a Texas Historical Commission property. Additional parking and an education building, which also houses offices, exhibition area, conference room and gift shop was completed in 2012.

Other historic homes in Rockport include the Hoopes-Smith and Leopold Bracht houses and the Moore, Wood, Al. Bracht and Fulton-Bruhl homes, which are all private residences.

Through Fulton's effort, the railroad came to Rockport and it began to grow as a fishing, hunting, and beach resort destination. Four trains arrived daily in Rockport. Trolley cars transported visitors from the depot to hotels, ice cream parlors, an opera house, bathing pavilions, and beaches. Private hunting and fishing clubs catered to visitors by providing transportation to and from club properties.

News of Rockport's incredible fishing led to the founding of commercial seafood and fishing companies more than 100 years ago. Much of the "Gulf" shrimp and oysters served throughout the country today is harvested from the various bays surrounding Rockport.

Two major hurricanes in 1916 and 1919, destroyed much of downtown Rockport, as well as the industrial and shipping industries that were an integral part of the community for decades. Hurricane Harvey wreaked havoc in 2017 and the area continues to rebuild.

Rockport Today

Those of us who make Rockport home are fully aware of the enviable qualities that define our way of life. We're blessed with a verdant peninsula, natural beauty, moderate climate, spectacular wildlife, and a warm, inviting populace.

It's the residents themselves that make Rockport stand out from its neighbors ... friendliness, involvement and commitment to maintaining the unique charm that has been associated with our community.