

PRESERVING LA VILLITA

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If you are visiting our beautiful city and enjoying the vibrant downtown River Walk, please take time to also visit **La Villita** – a quiet shopping area and thriving art

community that stands as a monument to San Antonio's past on the south bank of the San Antonio River. Its 27 restored historic buildings house a variety of arts and crafts shops.

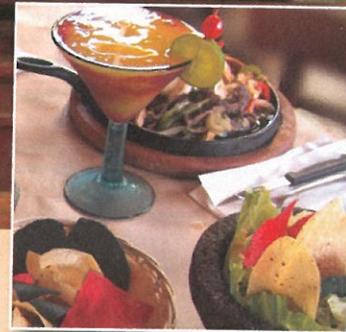
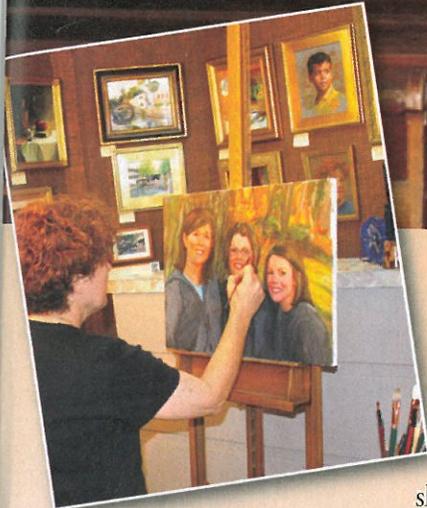
may know that it occurs in La Villita, and that all proceeds from **NIOSA**® go to the Society's mission to preserve historical properties, riverways, parks and customs of San Antonio.

It is fitting that, in 1942, funds from one of the early NIOSAs provided the down payment to buy and save the **Jeremiah Dashiell House**—the 1850 limestone structure at 511 Villita Street (across from the **Little Church of La Villita**). This house later served as the Society's headquarters and in 1974 it became the birthplace of Preservation Action – the national preservation lobbying organization. It remains a property of the Society, and now serves as a special event center for the neighboring **Fig Tree Restaurant**.

The City and the Society continued their preservation efforts for La Villita; it was designated as a City of San Antonio Historic District in 1969 and a National Register Historic District in 1972. In 1980, the city obtained a \$1.7 million grant from the federal Economic Development Administration to renovate the physical fabric of the La Villita area (as well as to restructure the management and tenant mix to revitalize it); the city then added another \$425,000 in matching funds.

The Society bought several other properties in La Villita to save them from destruction or to pay for their restoration: it still owns the **Otto Bombach House** that houses the popular **Little Rhein Steak House** and the **Gresser-Foutrel Complex** that now houses the **NIOSA**® headquarters. More than \$500,000 of NIOSA's proceeds have been spent on restoration projects in La Villita alone since a special fund benefiting La Villita and HemisFair Park was set up in 2001 as a part of NIOSA's lease contract with the City of San Antonio.

The Conservation Society truly walks the walk when it comes to preservation of this jewel, and encourages visitors and natives alike to wander the brick streets.



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The San Antonio Conservation Society is happy to have been part of the restoration of this wonderful downtown gem since the 1930s when the forward-thinking women that formed the Conservation Society – along with San Antonio Mayor Maury Maverick – recognized La Villita's value and fought for its restoration.

And what value it has: La Villita is a wonderful representation of San Antonio's charming, but complex, multi-cultural heritage. It started as a Coahuiltecan settlement (the indigenous tribes of the South Texas plains), and later contained crude housing for the Spanish soldiers assigned to the San Antonio de Bexar Presidio on the former San Antonio de Valero (Alamo) mission lands. After the 1819 flood, early settlers moved to higher ground and immigrants from Germany, France and Mexico began to populate the area, adapting their national architectural styles to produce a wonderful and eclectic mix of structures in brick, stone and adobe. In the early 20th century, La Villita hit a period of decline and became a slum. Thankfully, by the late 30s, the Conservation Society and Mayor Maverick launched into gear to preserve the decaying buildings.

If you have enjoyed **A Night In Old San Antonio**—the cultural festival put on by the Conservation Society for the past 63 years during our city's phenomenal Fiestacelebration each April—you