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Fleet Week San Diego kicks off months of fun, festivities today

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Fleet Week San Diego, that annual series of tributes to the region's military, started in 1997.

It quickly outgrew its name as more events crowded the calendar. Fleet Week soon stretched into a month, then two, then three.

The tradition continues this spring. Fleet Week will last nearly half a year – a record – and the first events will take place today.

“We added a tag line in 2008 for Fleet Week: 'Honoring the military throughout the year,' ” said Tom Caughlan, executive director of the nonprofit San Diego Fleet Week Foundation. The group works with community and business leaders to plan banquets, sports ceremonies, the Miramar Air Show and other gatherings for service members, their families and the general public.

“This is a military town, and the growth we're seeing reflects the unending interest in thanking and recognizing our service members,” Caughlan said.

Also responsible for this year's early start to Fleet Week is the desire for greater publicity.

Caughlan and other foundation officials worked with the Navy to move the Sea & Air Parade – a procession of Navy ships along San Diego Bay – from its usual slot in September to today. The timing change allowed the foundation to boost its marketing of Fleet Week by partnering with coordinators of the two-day Red Bull Air Race, which will begin today on the bay.

“There's no exchange of money,” Caughlan said. “The relationship is all about mutual promotion. By getting together, we have more press conferences and Web marketing and media attention.”

The Sea & Air Parade will start at 10:30 a.m., and the air race will begin at 1 p.m. Traffic in downtown San Diego is expected to be heavy because in addition to those two events, three cruise ships are expected to dock to load and unload passengers.

Fleet Week organizers urge visitors to use public transportation.


The Metropolitan Transit System will provide additional service on the San Diego Trolley to and from the Embarcadero area. Special trolleys with signs reading “Red Bull Race Trolley” will run from two stops in Mission Valley – Qualcomm Stadium and Fashion Valley – to three downtown stops: Seaport Village, the Convention Center, and the 12th & Imperial Transit Center.

Drivers headed downtown should park in the lots normally used for Padres games, Caughlan said. Shuttle buses will be available to take them to various spots for the parade and air race.

For more information about Fleet Week, go to fleetweeksandiego.org.

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