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## HEAVY MEDALS

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If the metallic clinking of the medals on their sashes doesn't get your attention, the light reflecting from them certainly will.

Looking (and sometimes acting) like homegrown versions of banana republic presidents, avid connoisseurs of Fiesta medals aren't too tough to spot.

Their collections wouldn't be complete without a set of the free medals passed out by ``real'' Fiesta royalty, such as King Antonio and El Rey Feo.

Other organizations offer medals for sale, often to help support nonprofit, charitable projects.

Fiesta's kings and queens have long worn special jewelry during the mega-party's 114-year history, but regal-looking hardware available to mere mortals is a relatively recent invention.

Coins handed out by local ``kings'' have been sought-after trinkets since the mid-1940s.

In 1971, Charles Orsinger, King Antonio XLIX, handed out 250 medals attached to a ribbon.

The Fiesta San Antonio Commission issued its first pin in 1985.

It wasn't until 1991, however, when the Battle of Flowers Association issued a special medal in honor of its 100th anniversary, that the sport of medal and pin collecting really took off.

Cal Sumner was a senior at Randolph High School in 1964 when he got his first coin from a member of Fiesta royalty.

Today, the 58-year-old Sumner -- who has been dubbed the ``Fiesta Hat King'' -- and his brother have a collection of more than 1,000 medals.

``I get most of mine at Fiesta kickoff events,'' he says. ``That's the best way to get them.''

More than 50 officially sanctioned Fiesta organizations have minted medals and pins for this year's event, which runs from next Friday through April 24. At least that many more individuals and unofficial organizations also have baubles for the public.

The Fiesta Store, operated by the Fiesta commission at 2611 Broadway, may have the largest inventory of medals and pins for sale in one location.

Most of the pieces are in the \$5 to \$8 range. The store also offers sets of pins and medals from previous years, in addition to tickets to some Fiesta events and tons of other Fiesta merchandise.

When it comes to medals, like that potato chip commercial used to say, the odds are good you can't wear ``just one.''

``Some people just like to dress up,'' says Anne Keever Cannon, public relations manager for the Fiesta San Antonio Commission. ``We associate lots of medals with Fiesta royalty and British high-class dukes and earls and people like that.

``You can be your own royalty for 10 days each year.''

1. Cal Sumner, aka the Fiesta Hat King, has more than a thousand medals, including the first one he collected (below, center) from King Antonio in 1964. PHOTO: J. MICHAEL SHORT/SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS  
2. San Antonio Botanical Garden Cost: \$8 Cause: Supports the botanical garden's heirloom plants and children's gardening programs. 3. San Antonio State School Cost: \$5 Cause: Helps benefit 300 people with mental retardation who live at the school. 4. American Red Cross Cost: \$8 Cause: Helps pay for relief efforts that benefit people affected by more than 70,000 disasters annually and aids U.S. military families around the world. 5. Alamo Square Dancers Cost: \$7 Cause: Helps defray the costs of the group's state, national and international charitable performances. 6. Fiesta San Antonio Commission Cost: \$50 Cause: Cost includes membership in the commission, a copy of Fiesta Magazine, a 15 percent discount on official merchandise at The Fiesta Store, 2611 Broadway, and more. 7. San Antonio Cactus and Xerophyte Society Cost: \$6 Cause: Education of gardeners and propagation of rare plant specimens. 8. Cal Sumner's collection includes an array of military Fiesta medals. PHOTO: J. MICHAEL SHORT/SPECIAL TO THE EXPRESS-NEWS

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