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Balboa Park Jubilee Should Be a Sweet Piece of Cake

By Logan Jenkins

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Balboa Park centennial, early concepts

Holy sheet cake.

The festive office-party *gâteau* is starting to look pretty good.

Fire up the Spreckles organ, sing happy birthday, blow out 100 candles and call it a centennial.

Hey, at least it's *something*.

After blowing nearly \$3 million on delusions of grandeur, a balanced sheet of realism may be in order.

Yes, San Diego council President Todd Gloria has pulled out "sheet cake" as a metaphor to express what the Balboa Park centennial should *not* be.

Like most of us, Gloria broadly supports something passably grand if not the grandiose Gatsby-level jubilee that fizzled out this week.

Sadly, the Rube Goldberg extravaganza appears to have been smoke, mirrors and lasers. Showy stuff spread out over 365 days in venues that would have eclipsed the park's priceless jewels — the museums. (Jim Kidrick, the director of the Air & Space Museum, tells me the park's "institutions" were left out of key planning loops.)

Well-paid players like Julie Dubick and Gerry Braun — a standout U-T metro columnist in his day but now a whipping boy — rue a run of bad luck. The Filner fiasco. The Jacobs bridge fiasco. Well, cry us a river all the way to your bank.

"Mismanagement and sheer ineptitude," snorts artist activist George Mullen, early centennial skeptic.

"Leadership never verbalized a single viable vision for our community to rally around except some light show they kept droning on about as if it was the

Second Coming. (They) actually thought San Diegans would hand over their hard-earned money based on their good looks and vague promises for putting together a celebration for us. Ha. San Diegans — rich, middle and modest — look darn smart in not trusting these folks and yet our political class handed over taxpayer money like it was ice cream."

And then Mullen asked: "Will the phoenix rise from the ashes?" (Or, as I rephrased it, will the pigeon rise from the poop?)

Well, it's up to Mayor Kevin Faulconer to conceive and deliver a plumed bird in nine months or so.

Here's what the mayor (whose wife, it should be noted, is a pro event planner) should consider:

Appoint a czar/czarina and give him/her absolute power to pull a Mitt Romney and salvage any gems from the wreckage of Balboa Park Celebration Inc.

Forget a yearlong world fair fixated on filling hotels. Think of the centennial as a museum-driven morale booster over a few months.

Focus like a laser on local and stress the word *free*.

The solution, as the Rolling Stones would phrase it, is just a KISS away. *Keep it simple, stupids.*

We cannot afford to dress up like Marie Antoinettes and preen over over-the-top Sochi-like pageantry.

But by all means, let us eat cake.

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