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October 19, 2026

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McAllen Events Earn Global Recognition ***Named one of only seven IFEA World Festival & Event Cities in 2026***

A commitment to bringing people together through festivals, cultural celebrations and community programs has earned the City of McAllen international recognition, with 36 awards across its events and programs while securing a place among only seven cities worldwide to be named a 2026 World Festival & Event City.

The 2026 IFEA/Haas & Wilkerson Pinnacle Awards were announced on Oct. 5 during the International Festivals & Events Association's (IFEA) 71st Annual Convention & Expo in Tucson, Arizona. The international awards program recognizes excellence, innovation, creativity in event production, marketing, operations and community engagement.

"To hear McAllen's name be called among festival and event leaders from around the world was a truly special moment," said Assistant City Manager Elvira Alonzo. "Each award reflects the heart, dedication and countless hours our teams and partners pour into bringing people together. Seeing that work recognized on an international stage fills us with pride."

Quinta Mazatlán earned eight Gold Awards for its work connecting the community with nature, promoting sustainability and advancing environmental education. Among the honors were Best Green Program for Planta Nativa, Best Educational Program for ReFest, Best Overall Entertainment Program for Thursday Night Live and Best Children's Programming. The nature and birding center also received a Silver Pinnacle Award for Monarch Fest, recognizing its efforts to raise awareness of monarch butterflies and conservation.

The **McAllen Holiday Parade** earned multiple Gold Awards and additional honors for its outstanding event production and community impact. Recognized as Texas' largest illuminated holiday and helium balloon parade, this signature celebration draws hundreds of thousands of spectators with its larger-than-life balloons, floats and festive entertainment. The parade's continued success reflects the creativity, coordination and community spirit behind one of South Texas' most anticipated holiday traditions.

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The **McAllen Public Library's** South Texas Book Festival earned a Gold Grand Pinnacle Award, the highest honor presented by IFEA. The award recognizes overall excellence through creativity, community impact, innovation, operational effectiveness, inclusivity and sustainability. Now known as the South Texas *International* Book Festival, the annual celebration brings readers and authors together through stories and conversations, inspiring families to discover new perspectives and pass the joy of reading on to future generations.

“Our goal is to make McAllen a place where families feel they belong, have opportunities to experience something special and build memories that become part of their stories for years to come,” said Mayor Javier Villalobos. “Whether exploring nature, enjoying our parks and community spaces, or attending signature celebrations like MXLAN, Fiesta de Palmas and the McAllen Holiday Parade, there is always something new to experience. This recognition reinforces McAllen’s reputation as a destination city where culture, entertainment and experiences meet to showcase the best of our city.”

The competition covers a wide range of categories, including marketing, sponsorship, accessibility, emergency preparedness and educational programming. Each entry must meet specific submission requirements and is evaluated against established criteria within its designated budget level, reflecting the rigorous process behind these industry honors.

The 36 awards earned across the City of McAllen’s events and programs reflect the scope and quality of work taking place throughout the organization. The international recognition highlights the creativity, planning and commitment to excellence that continue to distinguish McAllen as a global leader in the festival and events industry.

These events also contribute to McAllen’s economic vitality by attracting visitors, creating opportunities for local businesses and supporting a thriving local economy. This recognition is a point of pride for residents, reflecting the City’s continued efforts to create experiences that drive economic growth and enhance the quality of life for those who live, work and visit alike.

For more information about IFEA and the Pinnacle Awards, visit ifea.com.

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About the City of McAllen

Founded in 1904 and incorporated in 1911, the City of McAllen has grown from a small agricultural community into one of the most vibrant and fastest-growing cities along the U.S.–Mexico border. Known as the “City of Palms,” McAllen serves as a hub for international trade, retail, tourism, and culture in the Rio Grande Valley. Today, the city employs more than 2,600 dedicated public servants across 41 departments, delivering essential services to a community of more than 150,000 residents. McAllen city leaders remain committed to transparent governance, fiscal responsibility, and enhancing quality of life through innovation, infrastructure, and community engagement. For more information, visit www.mcallen.net and follow us on social media @cityofmcallen