

Celebrating, Comemmorating, Remembering

One City; Three Anniversaries

Introduction

In 2026, the City of Venice and the United States will be recognizing three important anniversaries. The purpose of this document is to provide structure, guidance, and recommendations for developing and planning items, events, and activities to recognize all the anniversaries. The ultimate goal being to provide a shared sense of the past, a guide for the future, and generate tourism dollars.

Celebrate – acknowledge a significant or happy day or event with a social gathering or enjoyable activity. There are many reasons to celebrate people, stories, and events connected to some of these anniversaries. Celebrations are the low-hanging fruit for activities. They allow for enjoying what past events mean today.

Commemorate – recall and show respect for someone or something. More somber in nature, events of this type allow for solemn tribute and recognition of difficulties and hardships endured by previous generations.

Remembrance – the action of remembering something. Events like this allow for grief, reflection, and healing. They can be difficult to produce and easy to be dismissed in favor of the other two types of recognition. However, it is these difficult undertakings that communities need sometimes to move forward.

Why Three?

The year 2026 marks three important anniversaries for the City of Venice and the United States. That year marks the Semiquincentennial of the United States (250 years), the Centennial of the incorporation of Venice (100 years), and the Quadrancentennial of 9/11 (25 years).

On July 4th, the United States marks the 250th year of its independence. Like other milestone years, the United States government and several private entities are already establishing Semiquincentennial Commissions. Several states have already begun their plans. This is an opportunity to look back on the vision and beliefs of the country's founders and respond to how we as a nation have implemented them – or not.

July 1st is when the State of Florida law incorporating the Town of Venice went into effect. This centennial will provide an official temporal place to plant the flag of Venice's beginning. It's still possible to give a nod to other significant dates (the post office of Venice opening in what is now Nokomis, the change in incorporation from town to city, etc.), but this year and anniversary can provide a clear official "birth date" of the municipality.

On September 11, the United States and Venice will have had twenty-five years to reflect on the worst terrorist attack on American soil that has ties to this community. Although national attention will be focused on New York City, the Pentagon, and Shanksville, PA, it would be remiss for the City to not recognize its association to this historic event.

What Themes Should Intertwine Through This Plan?

During these events, the community should reflect on our history using several approaches. Overall, the community should look to celebrate, commemorate, and remember these milestones. In order to do so successfully, it is important that the many voices and key players that make up the City of Venice drive events, activities, and other products of these anniversaries. Top down implementation can end up suffocating how a community wants to respond to these anniversaries and leaders should be cautious about going this route. City government should take a key role in activities, but more so the City should serve as a facilitator. Partnerships, collaborations, and open dialogue should allow the whole community to have a stake in the anniversaries.

The American Association for State and Local History has already published a field guide for history organizations to provide direction for the Semiquincentennial. It includes five themes for developing programs and events: Unfinished Revolutions, Power of Place, We the People, American Experiment, and Doing History. Additionally, other themes to consider include Defining Venice, Response to History, and My History is Our History.

Unfinished Revolutions

- Beyond the Revolution itself, what were other revolutionary moments in the history of our country, our states, and our communities?
- When have members of your community advocated for liberty and equality? How have those with power responded?
- How might the perspectives of different individuals or groups change how we think about the ongoing process of becoming “a more perfect union”?

Power of Place

- How has your “place” changed over time? Who has historically lived in your community and how did they experience major events in our past?
- What has been the relationship of people and nature in your community?
- What places are typically preserved today for their historic value? What other kinds of stories could be told there?

We the People

- Who is considered an “American”—and who gets to decide?
- How, when, and why have definitions of “the people” and ideas about belonging changed in the United States, in your state, or in your community?

American Experiment

- How was your local and state government organized and what were key moments in its evolution? Who did it serve—and who does it continue to exclude?
- When has the U.S. Constitution, your state’s Constitution, or other organizing charter changed? How and why did those changes happen?
- How can understanding the origins of government inform civic engagement in the present?

Doing History

- How do history professionals use different kinds of sources— written records, oral traditions, material culture, archaeological evidence, folkways—to make sense of the past?
- Whose stories have been collected in archives and museums and whose have been excluded? How has that influenced the way history is typically told?
- How can the inclusion of multiple perspectives and experiences clarify our understanding of the past?

Defining Venice

- What are the people, places, and stories that make up Venice? How does that definition vary among different classes, races, generations, and residential status?
- What is missing from these definitions to make them more complete?

Response to History

- How have broader historical events played out locally?
- How has the community responded to those events?

My History is Our History

- What is missing in the historical narrative we share with tourists and newcomers?
- What is different between history for tourists and history for locals? Should there be a difference?
- What can the community do about providing a wider perspective on Venice’s past?

The Next Milestones

- Anniversaries are a chance to pause and look back, but also to look forward. What will Venice and the United States be like in another 25, 50, or 100 years?
- What impacts will things like climate change, technology, and development have on the future of the John Nolen Plan?

This plan recommends incorporating some or all of these themes in planning for the anniversaries.

Timeframe

There is no reason why events, projects, programs, and activities should be limited to one specific date. With various partners and organizations participating and incorporating some of their current events into the anniversaries, historic events can be recognized over a longer time span. This document proposes starting events with the Holiday Parade in 2025 and ending in May 2027—the former date gets us to when Governor Martin appointed the first mayor and council while the latter is when Venice was renamed from a town to a city. Key milestones include Old Betsy’s retirement in December 2025, the celebration of the City Centennial/U.S. Semiquincentennial in early July 2026, and the September 11th Quadrancentennial in early-mid September 2026.

Approach

Without community involvement and support, none of this is achievable. It is imperative that representation from various community stakeholders form a working group or council with the City on getting input from citizens, sharing ideas and resources, and cross promoting events and activities. While the City should actively take on certain events, programs, and activities, it is more important that it work to facilitate and coordinate what other stakeholders are doing. This is mainly to ensure pluralistic and inclusive involvement. These anniversaries are for everyone to recognize as they see fit.

The first step should be meeting one-on-one with key stakeholders. This can provide levels of interest, engagement, and support. It can also be an opportunity to do some early brainstorming on what that stakeholder can bring to the table. Additionally, if certain stakeholders have members then it would be appropriate to discuss what listening sessions or outreach will they do to garner feedback.

It will be important for staff to reach out to neighborhood and other groups to inform them of the upcoming anniversaries. This will allow staff to gain feedback on what these groups would like to see done, and to encourage them to think about what they can/want to do. A key message to be delivered is not just what can the City do for these anniversaries, but what would your group like to do for these anniversaries? Looking at some of the potential themes, what is historical shouldn't be so narrowly defined. Instead, allow groups to see how their history and their story fit in. Inspire them to delve into that, and what can be shared with the entire community about their place in it. Be clear that we are not looking at only 1776, 1926, or 2001, but history up to the present day. This could ultimately lead to a fuller definition of Venice.

Stakeholders

Below is a list of potential stakeholders that can work together and with the City to create ways to recognize these anniversaries. This list is by no means exhaustive, and should be open to include other voices that may not be represented but want to participate.

American Legion	Venice Antique Auto Club of America
Area Businesses	Venice Area Beautification
Circus Community	Venice Area Chamber of Commerce
City of Venice	Venice Area Historical Society
COV Historical Resources	Venice Art Center
COV Manager's Office	Venice Aviation Society
COV Mayor & Council	Venice Gondolier
Daughters of the American Revolution	Venice Heritage
Gulf Coast Community Foundation	Venice Main Street
HOAs and Neighborhood Associations	Venice-Nokomis Woman's Club
Kentucky Military Institute Alumni	Venice Performing Arts Center
Local Schools	Venice Theatre
Moose Lodge	Venice Yacht Club
Sarasota County Schools	William H. Jervey Jr. Venice Public Library
Sertoma Club of Venice	Women's Sertoma Club of Venice
Suncoast Rotary Club	

Possible Ideas

- Beach Party – event already done by VMS and could mimic event that took place in 1927
- Dance at Hotel Venice
- Theatrical show(s) at Venice Theatre
 - Already in conversation with Kristopher Geddie
 - Musical on Mrs. Palmer
 - Produce a show popular in 1920s
 - Show about the American Revolution
 - The Day the World Came to Town
 - Something that covers some of the themes in a broad sense
- Publications
 - History articles in the *Gondolier*
 - Commemorative issue of the *Gondolier*
 - Graphic novel about early Venice
 - Using oral histories, based on the life of Julia Cousins Laning
 - Work with Ringling College Students for the design
 - History of Venice Book, 1920s-2000
 - Contract signed with publisher and currently working with Larry Humes
- Independence Day Parade
 - Can also be City Centennial parade
 - Community Picnic after parade
 - End parade at Community Center
 - Have car show after parade
 - Hot dog and/or watermelon eating contest
 - Longest table
 - Possibly talk with Linda Bradway or Shirley Boone (Old timer's Picnic)
- Story Corps Oral History Projects
 - 9/11 in Venice Oral History Project
 - I Grew Up In Venice Oral History Project
- Historical Resources
 - 9/11 online exhibit
 - CLARC Collection Days
 - Select days to encourage people to donate items to the collection
 - BLE Exhibit at Museum or rent space downtown for exhibit
 - Venice History Bingo (bingobaker.com)
- Celebrate Pocket Park Improvements
 - Improvements currently in 2026 CIP budget
- Tours
 - Thematic Trolley in partnership with Venice Heritage
 - Tours with Venice FL Tours
 - Centennial spin on Sebastian's Tours
- Students

- Lesson Plans for Teachers
- Thematic National History Day competition
 - Work with Sarasota County History Day
- Centennial Street Banner Contest for Students
- Venice in 100 years student essay contest
- Create historic plays for schools to perform
- Outreach at Events/Inform about Centennial & Centennial giveaways
- Word Cloud “What is Venice in One Word”
- Speakers Bureau to Give Venice History Lectures for HOAs/Communities
- Library
 - Semiquincentennial Talks Based on 250th Themes
 - Possibly through Florida Humanities
 - Displays from 9/11 Museum
- Centennial Spin on Current Events
 - Sun Fiesta
 - AAUW/Garden Club Tours
 - Book Fair
 - Holiday Parade/Old Betsy retirement
 - Shark’s Tooth Festival
- Airport
 - USO Show at Mobile Home Park Community Center
 - WWII Planes at Airport
- 9/11 Event in Patriots Park
- Memory Map – What places are most important to you
- Traveling Circus at Legacy Park; work with VAHS
- Family Fun Bike Ride
- Beautification
 - Plant 100 Trees
 - From Jim Yelverton and Earl Midlam
 - Centennial Mural on Tamiami and Venice
 - Erect a bronze bench with John Nolen sitting on it (it would be very popular for photos-and historical awareness). History organizations, VABI, whole community, Main Street
 - In place of that idea, plant a flower bed in red white and blue flowers making the American flag. This would be right next to the Patriot Park and 9/11 memorial. But easy to see from, US41- VABI and Garden Clubs (There is a mound of earth there now where American flags are placed.)
- Augmented Reality Experiences Downtown
- Venice 2076
 - A discussion with David Houle and/or Victor Dover
- KMI Reunion
 - KMI Panel on Life in Venice in KMI
- Marine Band at VPAC
- Dinner with past mayors, city managers, council, and Chamber of Commerce presidents

- Regatta
- Fishing Tournament (Tarpon Tournament?)
- Birthday party for centenarians
- World's Largest Anniversary Cake
- Hands Across the Urban Forest
- Bring in Nolen, Albee, and other descendants to talk about their family
- Drone photo of people organized as shark tooth
- Noon-Year's Day celebration/pass the torch from Chamber anniversary to City anniversary

Funding & Budget

The City already has a Centennial Fund. It is currently being used for historic preservation purposes, but in future budgets staff can recommend to City Council tapping into this fund for seed money to start planning.

Financial and in-kind contributions from businesses or other organizations. Develop sponsorship opportunities.

Florida Humanities Grants Community Project Grants (up to \$10,000 w/1:1 cost share)

Community conversations, interpretive exhibits (permanent or traveling, physical or digital), lectures and podcasts, community-wide reads, or reading- or film-and-discussion programs, book, film, and cultural festivals incorporating humanities activities, oral history projects, story-collection and sharing programs, interpretive tours or other types of site- or place-based humanities programming.

Florida Division of Historical Resources Small Matching Grants (up to \$50,000)

Heritage Education projects aimed at increasing public understanding and awareness of the history of Florida and the importance of its historical and archaeological resources and their preservation, either in general or for specific sites, properties or collections. This may include proposals such as walking tours brochures, education material for school children, interpretive signage, videos illustrating historic preservation principles, preservation of historical records through digitization and educational apps related to the history of Florida and/or its historical and archaeological resources.

Florida Division of Arts and Culture Specific Cultural Projects

Discipline-based projects include dance, literature, media arts (i.e., film, radio, or television), museum, music, presenter, theatre, traditional arts, and visual arts.

Florida Division of Arts and Culture Fast Track Projects (up to \$2500)

The Fast Track Project Grant Program provides expedited funds for small organizations through arts and cultural projects. This program is not intended to fund the general programming activities of your organization. Instead, this program supports projects including, but not limited to, artist residencies, performances, or exhibitions.