

The Texas Conjunto Music Hall of Fame & Museum was founded from the vision and lifelong dedication of Reynaldo "Rey" Avila Sr., a San Benito native whose passion for history and conjunto music inspired him to preserve one of Texas' most significant cultural traditions. As a young man, Rey discovered his love for conjunto music while working in the fields of El Campo, Texas, listening to local radio stations that featured the music of South Texas. His appreciation for the genre continued to grow throughout his life as he recognized the importance of documenting the stories of the musicians whose contributions had shaped the cultural identity of Texas.

Following his retirement, Rey and his wife, Aurora, traveled throughout the United States visiting historical landmarks and museums. During a visit to the Country Music Hall of Fame & Museum in Nashville, Tennessee, Rey realized that while other musical genres had institutions dedicated to preserving their history, there was no museum devoted exclusively to the pioneers of Texas conjunto music. Inspired by that experience, he returned home determined to establish a museum in San Benito the "Birthplace of Conjunto Music" where the history, artifacts, and stories of conjunto musicians could be preserved and shared with future generations.

Over the next several years, Rey traveled throughout Texas building relationships with musicians, recording oral histories, and collecting photographs, instruments, stage attire, recordings, awards, archival documents, and personal memorabilia. His dedication earned the confidence of many within the conjunto community, including the Betancourt family, owners of the historic IDEAL Records of San Benito.

Recognizing his commitment to preserving conjunto history, the family donated recording equipment, record presses, records, and numerous artifacts from the legendary recording studio. IDEAL Records was the first Mexican American-owned record label in South Texas and became one of the most influential conjunto and Tejano recording companies in the American Southwest during the 1940s and 1960s.

In 2001, Rey's vision became a reality when he secured federal nonprofit status and established the Texas Conjunto Music Hall of Fame & Museum. In 2007, the museum opened its first public location in a City of San Benito-owned building on Heywood Street, sharing space with the San Benito History Museum and the Freddy Fender Museum. What began as one man's dream quickly evolved into one of Texas' leading cultural institutions dedicated exclusively to preserving, documenting, interpreting, and celebrating the history of conjunto music.

Since its founding, the museum has become a destination for visitors from across Texas, the United States, and abroad. Its growing collection includes historically significant artifacts such as accordions, bajo sextos, stage costumes, photographs, recordings, songbooks, awards, archival materials, and personal memorabilia that document the lives and careers of the pioneers who shaped the conjunto tradition. Through permanent and rotating exhibits, visitors gain a deeper understanding of the music's cultural, historical, and social significance and its lasting impact on the heritage of South Texas.

The museum's mission extends well beyond preservation. Rey Avila believed that honoring history also meant recognizing the individuals who created it and inspiring future generations to carry that legacy forward. He established the Texas Conjunto Music Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony, which has honored more than 109 musicians, performers, broadcasters, promoters, and industry leaders for their contributions to the genre. He also created the "Noche de Ronda" Academic Scholarship Fundraiser, benefiting graduating seniors of the San Benito High School Conjunto Estrella Band, and co-founded "Conjunto in My Backyard," an educational program that brings together musicians, scholars, educators, students, and music enthusiasts to preserve the oral histories and traditions of conjunto music through community dialogue.

For nearly three decades, Rey devoted his life to promoting, preserving, documenting, archiving, and exhibiting the history of Texas conjunto music. His vision transformed San Benito into a recognized cultural tourism destination and reinforced the city's identity as the "Birthplace of Conjunto Music." His efforts established a permanent institution dedicated to preserving an important chapter of Texas history while strengthening community pride and cultural identity.

Reynaldo "Rey" Avila Sr. passed away on October 13, 2019, after a courageous battle with cancer. Although he did not witness the museum's continued expansion, his legacy remains the foundation of the organization.

Rey's lifelong commitment to preserving Texas' musical heritage earned numerous recognitions, including commendation from former Texas Senator Eddie Lucio Sr. for his service to the community, the San Benito News Citizenship Award, the South Texas Conjunto Association Lifetime Achievement Award, and the Rio Grande Valley Walk of Fame Lifetime Achievement Award. More importantly, his greatest legacy lives on through the museum itself, a vibrant cultural institution that continues to celebrate the pioneers of conjunto music while educating thousands of visitors each year about one of Texas' most treasured musical traditions.

Today, the Texas Conjunto Music Hall of Fame & Museum continues to build upon his vision through exhibitions, educational programming, community partnerships, cultural events, and archival preservation, ensuring that the history and legacy of Texas conjunto music will be preserved and shared for generations to come.

In 2019, following Rey's passing, his family stepped forward to carry his legacy into its next chapter. His daughter, Patricia Avila, now serves as Executive Director, guiding the museum's programs and partnerships. His son Peter Avila serves as Assistant Director, and his son Joe Avila serves as Treasurer, together providing the leadership and stewardship the museum needs to thrive. Rey's wife, Aurora Avila, volunteers weekly, and their other children, Terry and Rey Jr., have become regular volunteers as well. What was founded by one man is now sustained by an entire family committed to keeping his vision alive.

In the years since, the museum has only grown in reach and impact. We host weekly accordion classes that introduce a new generation to the instrument at the heart of conjunto music. We've built out educational programming, expanded our guided touring hours to welcome more visitors, and formed collaborations with universities and other institutions dedicated to preserving and promoting conjunto music as a living art form. We've also worked hard to secure federal grants that allow us to preserve the stories of conjunto music through live music events hosting programs like "Reels at the Museum" and documenting the legacy of the pioneers who built this tradition through our internet radio station Conjunto Hall of Fame Radio. Our work has not gone unnoticed: the museum has been featured as a tourist destination on the Texas Reporter, in Texas Monthly magazine, and in Texas Highways magazine.

This November, we are proud to build on that momentum with the Inaugural Texas Conjunto Hall of Fame Music Festival, held alongside our 22nd Annual Induction Awards, right here in San Benito the Birthplace of Conjunto Music. It is a milestone moment for an institution that began as one family's tribute to a tradition, and has become a beacon for an entire community and culture.