

# Opinion



Jerry Lara / San Antonio Express-News

Included in the significant public support for the Valero Alamo Bowl is free rent at the Alamodome for the organization that runs the game.



JOSH BRODESKY

There are many different ways to frame Derrick Fox's compensation of nearly \$600,000.

Valero Alamo Bowl board members like to say the target for Fox's compensation is the 75th percentile of all bowls, reflecting the game's standing as one of the best in the nation.

Another way to frame it is to say that for putting on an annual football game, Fox, the bowl's chief executive and president, earns more than San Antonio City Manager Sheryl Sculley, San Antonio Water System President and CEO Robert Puente, UTSA Athletic Director Lynn Hickey and San Antonio Food Bank President and CEO Eric Cooper.

But here's perhaps the most poignant way to frame Fox's compensation: He has made considerably more than the bowl has given away in scholarships.

That was true in 2004-05 when the Alamo Bowl gave away \$52,000 and Fox hauled in

## ALAMO BOWL PAY IS OUT OF CONTROL



Express-News file photo

Valero Alamo Bowl President and CEO Derrick Fox addresses the media at the 2012 Valero Alamo Bowl news conference at Sonterra Country Club in 2012. He earns about \$578,000 annually, while the bowl donates less yearly to scholarships.



Attorney Lamont Jefferson is this year's Valero Alamo Bowl chairman. He says the \$19 million in reserves is needed to ensure the stability of the bowl.



Pat Frost of Frost Bank is a board member of the Valero Alamo Bowl. He defends Derrick Fox's relatively high salary partly as necessary to keep Fox in San Antonio.

\$279,230, per tax records. It was true in 2009-10, when the bowl gave away \$10,000 and Fox's compensation jumped to \$419,045, again per tax records. It was true in 2014-15, the most recent tax records, when the bowl gave away \$432,500 and Fox earned \$578,216.

Alamo Bowl board meeting minutes show that in November 2015, Fox proposed to the compensation committee a five-year "catch-up" provision to bring employees, including him, to that 75th percentile level. The board never acted on the proposal, but for Fox it would have meant a bonus of more than \$850,000, records show.

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## Imagine a public space in the sky above Broadway

*"Some company recently was interested in buying my aura. They didn't want my product. They kept saying, 'We want your aura.' I never figured out what they wanted. But they were willing to pay a lot for it. So I thought if somebody was willing to pay that much for it, I should try to figure out what it is."*

Andy Warhol, 1975

By Antonio Petrov  
FOR THE EXPRESS-NEWS

The distinctiveness of Broadway within the urban fabric of San Antonio is an issue of dispute. Some regard the avenue as "the next big thing" in the city. Others argue Broadway is nothing more than a thoroughfare.

What is Broadway? Does it have the potential to reflect San Antonio's rich cultural landscape, lifestyle, and moral and physical geography?

What is its aura?



Courtesy photo illustration

A UTSA think tank envisions "1000 Parks and A Line in The Sky: Broadway, Avenue of the Future" as a way to reimagine the Broadway and city landscape.

The Expander Laboratory, a design and research "think/do-tank" in the University of Texas at San Antonio College of Architecture, Construction and Planning, set out to search for

Broadway's potential, with the hope that it could become one of America's great avenues.

The result is "1000 Parks and A Line in The Sky: Broadway, Avenue of the Future."

First, the background: We were interested in exploring different strategies and tactics for urban living. We wanted to discuss not only challenges for urban and suburban spaces,



Antonio Petrov: A call for input on a sky ride and series of parks along Broadway.

but also consider lifestyles too focused on the city and ecologism too concerned with nature. Ecologism is the notion that the nonhuman world is worthy of moral consideration and that social, economic and political systems should take that into account.

By 2040, San Antonio's population will have increased by more than 1 million people. Existing infrastructure, public transit and ecological systems will be challenged.

Dialogues about efficiency and sustainability on a larger scale have already begun. But how do we also engage the public to help reimagine, re-

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OPINION

**BRODESKY**

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A year earlier, in the same vein, he asked the bowl's compensation committee to consider a "tenure bonus" for staff, which several board members said would have, for him, equated to more than \$800,000. The board didn't act on that one either, but these are incredible requests from the head of a nonprofit organization that often promotes its community work. Bowl officials have said these weren't specific requests, but just ideas, among many, to bring staff pay up to market value.

Fox was willing to answer questions via email about the bowl but not about his compensation. Instead, he directed those questions to board mainstay Pat Frost of Frost Bank and this year's board chairman, Lamont A. Jefferson, a prominent attorney. Numerous other board members either declined comment, did not respond to interview requests, or could speak only off the record about their concerns because of close business and personal relationships with other board members.

"It's awkward for anybody to discuss their compensation in a public forum," Fox wrote in an email. "It's the board that sets my compensation, and I respectfully request that you seek answers from them on those questions."

In an interview, Frost was unequivocal in his support for Fox.

"Derrick, he took us from the 18th-best bowl in America to the seventh-best bowl," Frost said, citing the Alamo Bowl's ability to attract better and better games. "Derrick's management, his leadership, has brought us to the brink of being in the College Football Playoff."

Frost said the compensation was justified based on internal performance — "We had a great year" — but also from a national perspective when looking at executive pay at other bowl games.

He noted the Alamo Bowl's title sponsor, Valero, is very happy with Fox. So, too, are the Pac-12 and Big 12 conferences, whose teams play in the annual game.

"We are lucky Derrick hasn't gone somewhere else," Frost said. "And there is no doubt his compensation is one of the reasons why he hasn't. He has been well rewarded, and we feel that he has earned it."

In a later email, Frost said board members barely gave the bonus requests any consideration.

Compared to other major bowls, Fox's compensation is near but not at the top, just as Frost says. His compensation pales in comparison to that of the Cotton Bowl executive, who earned nearly \$1 million, per 2014-15 tax records.

But plenty of other established bowls have paid their executives less than Fox in recent years, notably the Holi-



Express-News file photos

In the 2015 Valero Alamo Bowl, the UCLA Bruins beat the Kansas State Wildcats 40-35. The bowl has gone from the 18th-best bowl to the seventh.



TCU dance team members perform in the stands during the Valero Alamo Bowl in the Alamodome on Jan. 2, 2016. Board members defend bowl CEO Derrick Fox's high salary, saying he has brought improvements and prestige to the bowl.

day Bowl in San Diego, Belk Bowl in Charlotte and TaxSlayer Bowl in Jacksonville.

And then there is the Rose Bowl, which paid its chief executive \$427,000, according to 2014-15 tax forms. That's a lot of money. That same year, Fox earned \$578,000.

"Some of those things consultants have pointed out is some of those other bowls and where they are at," said Lance Tibbet, a Tournament of Roses executive committee member. "For us, it's kind of like, well, is running the Rose Parade and the Rose Bowl, is that any more important or deserving of any more pay than say, you know, those civic leaders in our town that are running businesses and government?"

In San Antonio, the answer to that question is yes.

The bowl is a private entity, but it receives public financial support. That makes Fox's compensation of legitimate public interest.

As a nonprofit, the Alamo Bowl receives tax-exempt status. It also gets free rent from the city for its offices at the Alamodome, only paying for telecommunications. The Convention & Visitors Bureau —

still a municipal entity — sponsors the game annually, \$300,000 in 2015 and 2016, in return for four TV spots and other promotions. The state also provides about \$500,000 in support from its event fund.

The game also benefits from millions of dollars in improvements to the Alamodome, including more than \$43 million in ongoing upgrades that helped land the Final Four in 2018. Fox has used these upgrades to make his pitch to host a College Football Playoff championship game.

This is a bit of a sore point with some because the bowl is sitting on roughly \$19 million in assets. The board is holding these reserves to cover the costs of a championship game, even though it is almost certainly out of reach. Twice the bowl has bid and twice it has been rejected because the dome, even with the upgrades, isn't up to snuff.

"It just doesn't measure up to the other stadiums that happened to be available in this bidding process," College Football Playoff Executive Director Bill Hancock said in a November Express-News story. "But I think without major changes in the stadium, for our event at

least, it will be a long putt for San Antonio."

"Long putt." That's about as kind as you can be in a rejection, and yet Fox has been intent on pushing forward.

"I appreciate Bill's candor, and one of the things we need to know going forward is exactly what it is we can do to make sure we can land this event for the community," he said in that same November story.

In our email interview, he doubled down on this point, saying the reserves were crucial for bringing the big game here.

Could the reserves be put to other uses? Of course. At one point, for example, the Alamo Bowl's board debated donating \$1 million toward a practice facility for the University of Texas at San Antonio's new football program, but instead chose to sit on the cash.

"Great board debate," Frost said. "It was a lot of interesting discussion, and the end of the story is, we didn't do it."

Jefferson, the bowl's board chairman, said that beyond the championship bid, the reserves cover contingencies such as the loss of a title sponsor.

"Why not spend it? It is being spent," he said. "It's invested in the bowl, in the stability of the bowl. The better the bowl does, the more scholarships it can reward over time. I appreciate that sentiment, 'Hey you got a lot of money there, just spend it now.' But if you spend it now, you don't have the reserve."

True, but the bowl also isn't facing any instability. Valero's sponsorship has been extended through 2019, and the bowl's TV deal with ESPN runs through 2025.

All of this — the \$19 million in the bank, Fox's compensation, the missed opportunity to do something big for UTSA football — is particularly striking because Fox has historically trumpeted the charitable acts of the bowl system.

He got himself into hot water speaking before Congress in

2009, when he said, "Almost all of the postseason bowl games are put on by charitable groups" and that "local charities receive tens of millions of dollars every year."

Not only were a good number of the bowls privately owned, but reporters found the 23 existing nonprofit bowls gave \$3.2 million to local charities on \$186.3 million in revenue.

But Fox said something more granular. Asked by U.S. Rep. Joe Barton, R-Ennis, about how much "money" from the Alamo Bowl goes to "classic charities," Fox said, "There are several hundred thousand dollars that will go out to local organizations."

"Whether it's Boys & Girls Clubs, whether it's Kids Sports Network, you name it. There are a number of different organizations who benefit from the bowl as well."

Tax records show the scholarships but not the other philanthropy. When I asked Fox for clarification or supporting documents for the statement, a bowl representative sent me a list that included more than \$400,000 in donations from 2008. This is in addition to scholarships and payouts to participating football teams.

The list did include donations to Kids Sports Network, Leukemia & Lymphoma Society, the food bank and others. It also includes more than \$330,000 in "tickets." Got it? Tickets, not actual money that helps keep these nonprofits going. There's a difference.

In closing our email interview, Fox said he was proud of the bowl's growth, its economic impact and the scholarships it has awarded since 2000. He said the bowl is on track to give \$3 million in scholarships by its 25th anniversary.

That would be quite an achievement. When it happens, maybe he can celebrate with an \$800,000 bonus.

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**BROADWAY**

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build and replan public transit, public space and more sustainable growth?

It is no secret that San Antonio's roads need repair and our mass transit system needs capital improvement. But larger systemic issues also exist.

Alexander D'Hooghe, an MIT professor and director of the institute's Center for Advanced Urbanism, argues that culture is not only a collective reflection of shared values but that it also "requires, at its most basic level, a common space for these expressions to be articulated and received."

Cities across the nation — New York, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Boston and elsewhere — have recognized the need for movement from the periphery back into the center. Under the umbrella of landscape urbanism, many of their newly designed parks and public spaces incorporate artifacts of the American industrial landscape — or unused and underutilized interstitial spaces.

We live in an age of growing awareness of how human activity impacts the climate and environment. But addressing these is not simply about creating a more environmentally friendly way of living.

What is the role of design in enabling social imagination, debate and democratic space? What are the costs and benefits of increasing or decreasing the degree of citizen control in building the city? How do we imagine design as an agency of social and cultural sustainability? Can we reasonably posit alternatives and, if so, what would they look like?

We came up with "1000 Parks and A Line in The Sky: Broadway, Avenue of the Future." We propose a system of 1,000 parks below a Skyride transportation system that connects San Antonio International Airport to Travis Park.

If you were born between 1964 and 1999, you certainly remember the Brackenridge Park sky ride (1964) and the HemisFair Monorail (1968). It seems like everybody remembers gliding through the sky, feeling the wind in their hair, or seeing the horizon and experiencing the city from a completely new vantage point with a smile on their face.

Both rides were limited to Brackenridge Park and HemisFair. But what if this Skyride could connect the airport to downtown, and possibly to the missions? What if there was a sky bus that could comfortably transport visitors and residents alike through a system of 1,000 urban parks along Broadway? This project's ambition is to



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At one time, San Antonians could ride these trams above Brackenridge Park.

improve existing space and expand our understanding of public parks and alternative public transportation. It aims to hybridize infrastructure, transportation and green space into "1000 Parks and A Line in

the Sky," our vision for Broadway. It's a 8.6-mile-long public space for the future.

From the airport — from moment of arrival to departure — all the way to our downtown core, parks of varying sizes

would line the route below the Skyride. They would invite residents and visitors to fully engage with the city and with one another.

New York City has Central Park and the High Line. Chicago has the Burnham Park and boulevard system, and Millennium Park. Could Broadway be San Antonio's avenue, the first urban infrastructure of its kind completely reimaged, rebuilt and replanned by its residents?

We want to activate 1,000 spaces — filled with unique ideas, demands and desires of how a park in a neighborhood should be, culled from the public. Should this space be a dog park or an art park? What would residents love to see in these spaces that reflect San Antonio's culture and creativity?

We want our residents and visitors alike to take full ownership of public space in the city. The spaces for parks below the Skyride are unused and underutilized interstitial spaces we've identified along Broadway.

How does this work? Stay tuned. Join us at the UTSA Institute of Texan Cultures this fall for an exhibition of our work and the beginning of the public input phase.

*Dr. Antonio Petrov is an assistant professor of architecture at the University of Texas at San Antonio.*