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SYMBOLIC APHRODITE | BRIDGING THE CENTURIES

PIECE OF PAST EMBRACED ON THE NEW MAIN PLAZA

Once shunted aside, even
destroyed, Lady Justice returns

BY GREG JEFFERSON

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On Sunday night, the drape dropped from Lady Justice and her perch, the restored J.L. Mott fountain, in front of the Bexar County Courthouse, marking the end of an 81-year absence.

Local officials dedicated the statue and fountain in a ceremony on the redeveloped Main Plaza.

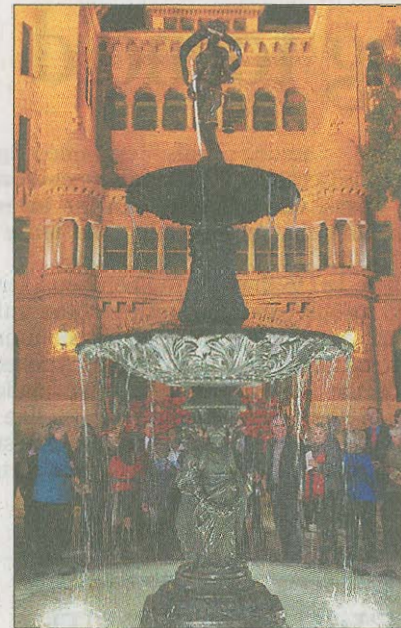
County Judge Nelson Wolff said the unveiling was part of the county and the Hidalgo Foundation's "ongoing work to restore and revitalize this historic courthouse and to beautify our portion of downtown

San Antonio."

The county spent \$2.6 million to install the fountain, security cameras and facade lighting for the courthouse. The money also went for new landscaping, waterproofing the building's foundation and improved access for disabled people.

Previously, the county contributed \$2.5 million to the city's redevelopment of Main Plaza, including funding for the county to reclaim the small slice of property in front

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EDWARD A. ORNELAS/eornelas@express-news.net

A crowd witnesses the unveiling of the recreated Lady Justice — atop a globe, atop the restored J.L. Mott fountain, in front of the Bexar County Courthouse on Main Plaza.

County originally bought statue, fountain in 1896

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of the courthouse.

Mayor Phil Hardberger said the transfer meant "we won't lose Lady Justice for another 81 years — she will have a home."

The county bought the statue and fountain from J.L. Mott of New York in 1896, but handed them off to the city in 1927 to make room for a courthouse ex-

pansion. They went on display at a San Antonio Water System pump station on Market Street.

But vandals destroyed the original Lady Justice statue in 1997 and damaged the fountain, which then went into storage.

The Hidalgo Foundation, headed by Tracy Wolff, the county judge's wife, recovered the fountain pieces and in 2006 commissioned local sculptor

Gilbert Barrera to restore the fountain and recreate the statue.

The Hermann family donated \$85,000 for the effort.

The diminutive, blindfolded statue, standing about 4 feet tall, holds a sword in her right hand and scales in her left, with a metal ribbon whipping around her head. She's standing on a globe.

The figure is Aphrodite, the half-sister of Themis, the goddess of law and order.

And she's nude — the source of some excited reporting last week on radio and the Internet.

But Barrera says the image has solid footing in mythology.

"In Greek mythology," he said, "bareness and naturalness were a sign of purity, goodness and justice."