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City Coat of Arms

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Pirate museum coming to bayfront

Pirate expert Pat Croce buys TepeeTown site

Pat Croce is moving his Pirate Soul Museum from Key West to the former Christmas Shop/ TepeeTown site on St. Augustine's bayfront.

Croce, considered an expert on the Age of Piracy, scouted the property during his visit here in December to present Pirates! Fact & Fiction, a program in our 450th First America series.

Pat Croce

TepeeTown renovations begin

His $10 million Pirate Soul Museum opened in Key West in 2004, with his collection of some 500 artifacts, coupled with interactive technology. Work has already begun to convert the St. Augustine properties, nestled between our Colonial Spanish Quarter and Castillo de San Marcos.

While pirates are Croce's passion, he's recognized for pioneering in the sports medicine field, former president of the Philadelphia 76ers, motivational speaking, and is author of books on motivation and piracy.

Marge Adelsperger

Marge hangs up her apron

Thirty-three years after the adventure began, Marge Adelsperger, the smiling face of the Spanish Bakery on St. George Street, is retiring - sort of.

"I'll still be on call for those large school groups and the like," she says.

The adventure began for Marge and her late husband, Dewey, back in 1976, when he was exhibits director for the state preservation board here.

"They were restoring the Arrivas and Salcedo house and kitchen buildings when Dewey suggested we lease the kitchen."

Son Gene and crew will keep the popular eatery going - and keep a light on for Marge.

Bridge may become flood surge armament

Bridge of Lions contractor Skanska is aiming for a reopening of the restored span February 15, but plans to dismantle the temporary bridge dominated Chief Operations Officer John Regan's report to city commissioners Monday.

He's been negotiating a multilateral agreement with the contractor, Florida Department of Transportation, St. Augustine Port Authority, and state Department of Environmental Protection which could move the bulk of the concrete remains to the south end of Riberia Street for a required "floor surge armament."

"The state is requiring an elevated armament around the former landfill," he told commissioners, "and that could cost $600,000 to one million dollars. That cost can be reduced to about $100,000 with agreement to use that bridge material."

Skanska requested permission to cut pilings for the temporary bridge two feet below the mud level, rather than pulling up the 90-foot pilings. In exchange, Skanska would donate $25,000 to the city, and consider trucking the concrete to Riberia Street.

Regan said plans to create an artificial reef with the concrete are all but dead, with concern for right whale grounds. In on negotiations is our Port Authority, which wants ten percent of the concrete for another reef.

Commissioners liked the numbers, and asked Regan to continue negotiations.

Commission OKs vending bans

After three hours of public hearings and testimony, our City Commission Monday unanimously approved ordinances to ban vending and street performances in the west garden of Government House and Anderson and Ponce de Leon circles, and panhandling at King and

Perhaps her best retirement gift: Southern Living Magazine's April issue will carry the Spanish Bakery as one of the top eight breakfast places in the southeast, she says. "We don't think of ourselves as a breakfast place, but I won't argue."

Sign on for Report

Previous Issues

Malaga streets.

Commissioner Leanna Freeman hesitated before casting a yes vote, concerned that "they (artists) are casualties of our inability to regulate vendors," while Vice Mayor Errol Jones argued, "We should not provide free retail space to anyone."

City Attorney Ron Brown said the city is continuing to look for other venues that might work for the prohibited activities.

In other action, commissioners advanced to later public hearings proposed ordinances restricting parking of certain types of commercial vehicles and trailers on residential streets and establishment of a floodplain management code, and a resolution to apply for funding to convert the Visitor Center parking facility lighting to an LED system.

Former NPS director chosen for 450 board

Robert Stanton

Former National Park Service Director Robert G. Stanton was selected Monday night by our City Commission to fill the third city-recommended seat on the federal St. Augustine 450 Commemoration Commission.

His recommendation came from resident Bill Leary, a former Washington colleague, who said his character and abilities will serve well on the federal panel.

Stanton capped nearly half a century with the NPS with appointment as the agency's director from 1997 to 2001, and last May, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar recalled him to be Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Policy, Management, and Budget.

Others recommended by our city are former US Senator and Governor Bob Graham and Father Tom Willis of the St. Augustine Diocese. The recommendations go to to Interior Secretary Salazar for appointment.

Echo House school plans advance

Plans are moving forward to restore Lincolnville's historic Echo House to become the St. Paul School of Excellence.

St. Paul Pastor Ron Rawls, working with our county school district, contractor Colin Bingham, and an advisory board including Global Wrap co-owner Judith Seraphin, has high hopes the private school can open with a kindergarten in August at the church parsonage and move into Echo House for the 2011-12 school year.

Challenges include securing the vacant property during renovation - Judith's company will donate wrapping the roof - and financing the estimated $617,000 project.

Rawls' team was in the midst of trying to find a permanent location for the school when City Commissioner Leanna Freeman put him in touch with Echo House Trustee Tony Miles. The long-vacant property was cited last fall as unsafe, and negotiations began to transfer ownership while addressing an immediate need to secure the buildings.

A People United tackles community concerns

Echo House, new jobs, teens on St. George Street, and the newly opened W.I.L.D. Flower clinic in West Augustine are among agenda items as "A People United" gathers Thursday at 6 p.m. at St. Paul AME Church on ML King Avenue.

It's the first anniversary meeting in a quarterly series organized by St. Paul Pastor Ron Rawls, "to make sure that St. Augustine and St. Johns County work for all residents." The series has spun off subgroups for specific concerns, such as an educational & academic resources team. They'll meet at 5 p.m. at the church, ahead of the general meeting.

Rawls says such spin-off groups look at ways to strengthen programs, then "share with the larger body any concerns or issues that we may be able to provide assistance in addressing." Contact Pastor Rawls 904 829-3918 for information.

History's Highlights

Castillo - Legacy to Spanish Empire

One in a series of historic features as we prepare for our commemorations, drawn from research by George Gardner

For an empire often tardy if responding at all to its presideo's needs at St. Augustine, the commitment to build a solid fortress in this distant outpost was astounding - and ultimately costlier than anticipated.

The garrison had gone through nine wooden forts in its first100 years, casualties of indians, pirates, and weather. The attack by Captain Robert Searle's pirates in May, 1668, leaving 60 dead, was enough. Ten months later, Mariana, Queen Regent of Spain, ordered construction of a permanent fort.

The building material would not be wood, but newly discovered coquina, minute seashells solidified with lime to create a soft but solid stone, to form walls 13 feet thick at the base, graduating to nine feet at the top - 20 feet above.

August 8, 1671, work began on a fortification that would be 24 years in construction, and centuries beyond in endurance. The Castillo de San Marcos' coquina could fill a football field to a height of 78 feet, and the cost, first estimated at 70,000 pesos, $9,800,000 today, rose to an estimated quarter of a million pesos, the equivalent of $30-$35 million dollars today.

True to its mission, this mighty legacy to the Spanish Empire has never fallen in battle.

Castillo bell tower

A detailed account of the building of the Castillo de San Marcos is in the National Park Service Handbook, available at the Castillo.

The St. Augustine Report is published by the Department of Public Affairs of the City of St. Augustine each Tuesday and on Fridays previewing City Commission meetings. The Report is written and distributed by George Gardner, former St. Augustine Mayor (2002-2006) and Commissioner (2006-2008) and a longtime newspaper reporter and editor. Contact The Report at gardner@aug.com

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