



# THE ST. AUGUSTINE REPORT

Local news in our Nation's Oldest City



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## Commission OKs bidding on foreclosed site

City commissioners in a 3-2 vote Monday authorized City Manager Bill Harris to proceed with efforts to purchase the car wash site at US 1 and King Street. The vote came at a special meeting, with Vice Mayor Errol Jones and Commissioner Nancy Sikes-Kline opposed. The property is in foreclosure and scheduled to be auctioned Thursday on the Courthouse steps.

The property has mortgages totaling \$233,000. Sikes-Kline argued that this is not the time to make the purchase, while Jones noted its former use as a gas station could bring costly environmental remediation.

Mayor Joe Boles reflected the majority opinion: "In these times, when opportunities come along, we have to think of the future."

Commissioners appeared to agree the property should be landscaped to beautify what Boles called "the most important entrance to our city."

## Amtrak rail plan rejected

A plan for Amtrak commuter rail service from Jacksonville to Miami, with a station in St. Augustine, has been rejected, the Jacksonville [Business Journal](#) reports.

Federal Road Administrator Joseph Szabo notified the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) that the Jacksonville-Miami proposal "did not demonstrate that the project was sufficiently developed to receive funding for the proposed activities..."

The requested \$268 million would have been used to allow Amtrak passenger trains to use the Florida East Coast Railway line, thus connecting Florida east coast cities that do not receive Amtrak service through the current Miami-Tampa-Orlando-Jacksonville line, said Nazih K. Hadda, FDOT passenger rail development manager.

"We are going to continue to work with Amtrak to get this service," said Hadda.

## Shaving sidewalks saving dollars



Photo from Florid City Heritage Days

## Explore Florida Crackers Friday

They came in the first wave of settler recruits when Britain took over the Florida territory from Spain in 1763.

Their name may have come, as the Earl of Dartmouth suggested, "from being great boasters," or from their style of capturing and herding cattle with bullwhips and dogs.

Authors/storytellers Janis Owens and Dana Ste.Claire, along with a Cracker whip cracker, traveling snake oil salesman and Bluegrass musicians, will unravel the history of this hardy breed in

the frontier of Florida as our First America series continues Friday at 7 p. m. in Flagler College Auditorium.

Doors will open at 6 p.m. for our modern explorers to get their passports stamped and visit "Cracker gizmos and gadgets" in the lobby. Passports will be available if you missed earlier First America programs.

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Previous Issues

Public safety and economy meet on our city's sidewalks.

Ocala's [Precision Sidewalk Safety](#) crews have been busy since last November, grinding down those sidewalk heaves, usually caused by tree root growth - and saving the cost of traditional tearing up and replacing sidewalks.

Work began around the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind and this month the company will be completing sidewalk shaving in our Historic Preservation areas.

City Manager Bill Harriss said the work will continue as long as the funding holds out.

City Commissioner Nancy Sikes-Kline, notified by residents "that someone is out grinding bumps in the sidewalks," found that Public Works Deputy Director Todd Grant proposed it as a cost effective program to make our city sidewalks safer for pedestrians.

"The program saves the taxpayers the cost of sidewalk replacement and repairs in cases where all that is needed is adjustment," Nancy said. "Even better, it enhances our city's walkability, especially for seniors, the very young and impaired users - a goal I think we all share." Details on our city [website](#).



## Community unites for Haiti relief

Last Thursday it was a Bartram Trail High School concert raising more than \$2,000; a week earlier a drop-off at San Sebastian Catholic Church that nearly filled a 40-foot trailer with supplies, including ten pallets of bottled water, along with more than \$1,100 in donations.



Our fire department's main station on Malaga Street has opened its facility for donations weekdays 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., American Legion Post 194 on Pearl Street in West Augustine is collecting from 3:30 to 5 p.m. daily, and our community's pastors will gather at 7 p.m. Thursday at New Mt. Moriah Christian Ministry, 676 Christopher Street, for prayer and planning.

Just some of the efforts as our community turns out to assist earthquake-devastated Haiti.

Personal connections were at Bartram Trail in Haitian-born school staff. The fund-raising included \$400 from students who paid fifty cents to wear a hat or have their shirts untucked for a day, and teachers - a dollar to wear jeans one day.

The San Sebastian Church effort was led by Phil McDaniel, Vice

Mayor Errol Jones, and County Commissioner Ken Bryan, in cooperation with U. S. Rep. Corrine Brown and State Senator Tony Hill.

Recommended items include non-perishable food items, canned food in pop-top cans, water and juices, warm weather clothing, flat shoes or boots, towels, washcloths, lightweight quilts and blankets, sleeping bags, first aid medical supplies, toiletries, insect repellent, candles, flashlights, batteries, tarpaulins, trash bags, plastic wrap, packing tape, and tents.

## Applications, balloons on PZB agenda

Our Planning and Zoning Board (PZB) will try to sort out application withdrawals and amendments as well as regulation of tethered balloons as it meets today at 2 p.m. in the Alcazar Room at City Hall.

The question of when an application can be amended or must be submitted as a new application has been ongoing, as applicants try to meet PZB standards. At stake for applicants is whether they must pay another application fee - and wait a year - before reapplying.

Tethered balloons are new to city officials, who recently rejected a plan to establish a hot air balloon business on the former Bozard Ford lot on US 1.

## ***HARB OKs restaurant, mulls demolition***

A restaurant at 76 Spanish Street might work, but our Historic Architectural Review Board (HARB) wants to do a walk-through before considering demolition of 74 Spanish Street, and a request to demolish the former Casa de la Paz on the bayfront has been tabled until March to allow owner George Arnold time to develop plans to retain the building.

Arnold originally sought demolition of all three buildings, and has been negotiating with the board for several meetings. HARB will revisit the 74 Spanish Street demolition request at its February 18 meeting, as well as designs for wayfinding signage in our historic district, and Flagler College's proposal for a welcome center on Cordova Street. The idea of a protective fence around the Constitution Monument in our Plaza de la Constitución has been put on hold.

## ***History's Highlights***

### ***The enigma of St. Augustine's colonial past***

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

Buff Gordon knows we have a lot of work to do to straighten out St. Augustine's role in the history of America and the world. In a talk to our Historical Society five years ago, the photographer, artist, art historian, and author of *Florida's Colonial Architectural Heritage* (University Press of Florida 2002), cited some challenges:

"I was asked to give a tour of colonial St. Augustine to a well-known educator from New England. I walked him through the beautiful Flagler College and into the colonial town, ending at the Plaza and Government House. I told my guest that the Town Plan dates to 1573 and 1598, and of course I quoted Michael Gannon's infamous line that St. Augustine had undergone urban renewal before the pilgrims landed at Plymouth. My New England guest looked me in the eyes and said: 'this does not count, it is Spanish!'"

"Charles Mann, author of a very popular book, *1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus*, wrote an Op-Ed piece in *The New York Times* about the arrival of new species of flora and fauna in North America. I quote: 'Until the arrival of the Mayflower, continental drift had kept North America and Europe apart for hundreds of millions of years. Plymouth colony (and its less successful predecessor in Jamestown) reunited the continents.'"

And, "The Smithsonian published an article with the sub-headline that the people of Jamestown were 'America's first permanent residents,' while the Associated Press wrote an article titled 'Colonial History' saying: 'If you're teaching American history chronologically, the start comes at Roanoke Island.'"

Buff says Walt Whitman summed it up: "We Americans tacitly abandon ourselves to the notion that our United States have been fashion'd from the British Islands only, and essentially form a second England only - which is a very great mistake."

Buff is among a small army planning to set the record straight as St. Augustine takes center stage for its 450th anniversary as America's oldest continuously occupied European settlement.

**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](mailto:gardner@aug.com)

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