



THE ST. AUGUSTINE REPORT

Local news in our Nation's Oldest City



Published by the Department of Public Affairs, City of St. Augustine, Florida

March 30 2010

Amtrak rail plan stays on track

Cities along a proposed east coast Amtrak rail line from Jacksonville to Stuart vowed last week to continue lobbying state and federal governments for funding to make it happen.

St. Augustine City Commissioner Nancy Sikes-Kline and Planning and Building Director Mark Knight, both representatives on the North Florida Transportation Planning Organization, joined officials from Jacksonville, Daytona Beach, Titusville, Cocoa, Melbourne, Vero Beach, Fort Pierce and Stuart - all proposed stops on the line, in a session at Cocoa's City Hall.

Our Tourist Development Council's Glenn Hastings was there as well, representing the increased tourism potential.

Our City Commission has already approved a station location here, at King Street and US 1, which would be built with project funds and maintained by our city.

Responding to angst among the delegates on the \$1.25 billion in federal funds allocated for a high-speed rail system between Orlando and Tampa, Sikes-Kline noted, "That will cost about \$60 million a mile, while the cost of expanding Amtrak along the existing FEC line, \$268 million, is under \$1 million a mile." She says Amtrak is planning an inspection trip in late April or early May.

The Amtrak proposal has been rejected once, Federal Road Administrator Joseph Szabo saying it "did not demonstrate that the project was sufficiently developed to receive funding for the proposed activities..." But State Transportation Secretary Stephanie Kopelousos urged continued efforts, noting the Obama administration's support of commuter rail service.



'He breathes Florida history'

Easter 2010

Traditional Easter Sunrise Services in the shadow of our Castillo de San Marcos will open Easter 2010 at 7 a. m. Sunday. The service is organized by the Christian Ministerial Alliance of St. Johns County.

The day will continue with an Easter Promenade at 12:30 in our Plaza, and annual Easter Parade at 3, both events sponsored by the St. Augustine Easter Festival Committee.

The festival promenade features prizes in a variety of categories including not only Easter finery but such as oldest couple, largest family, and farthest from home.

The parade steps off at 3 p.m. from our Mission of Nombre de Dios, proceeding along San Marco Avenue and Avenida Menendez, to Cathedral Place and Cordova Street.

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

[Previous Issues](#)

For most of his 82 years, Dr. Michael Gannon has studied and written about Florida history, from the mission period and development of Catholicism (*Rebel Bishop* and *The Cross in the Sand*) to World War II (*Pearl Harbor Betrayed*).

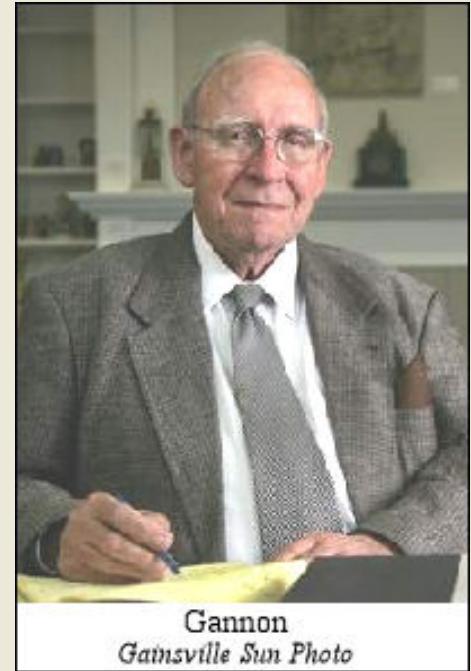
The distinguished service professor of history emeritus at the University of Florida last week was awarded the first Florida Lifetime Literary Achievement Award. He was the unanimous choice of a five-judge panel selected by the Florida Humanities Council.

"He lives and breathes Florida history," Florida Humanities Council Executive Director Janine Farver said. Last Wednesday's award announcement is in the [Gainesville Sun](#).

His singular passion for Florida history includes as well a play, recounting the 1946 lawsuit against Pulitzer Prize-winning Florida author Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings by her good friend, Zelma Cason, for invasion of privacy.

Gannon attended Monday's dress rehearsal of the Classic Theater's production of *My Friend Zelma* at the Limelight Theatre. The play runs tonight and April 6, 13 and 20. Producer [Jean Rahner](#) 904-829-5807 has details.

Among Dr. Gannon's numerous awards is our city's highest honor, the La Florida Award.



Gannon
Gainesville Sun Photo

Can you turn now??

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT), responding to a priority concern of our City Commission, has created a dedicated right turn lane for westbound traffic off the restored Bridge of Lions.

The two lanes off the west approach to the city are now separated into the right lane-right turn lane and left lane for traffic going straight or turning left.

Meanwhile, the heavy lifting in dismantling the temporary bridge has closed the channel to all marine traffic until Saturday. Project spokesperson Laurie Sanderson told commissioners last week the temporary bridge removal and remaining road work are scheduled for completion by October, and landscaping of the entries by December. With project completion our sentinel lions will return.

Imagine those signs ...



Looking like a well-weathered sign, this was painted just recently on one of the buildings at the Old Jail which will eventually house the Oldest Store collection.

That weathered look is the artistry of Monty Tris, one of Disney's Imagineers and a designer for major film studios, and now a resident of St. Augustine.

He's painted several other historic signs along the side of the building that will eventually house the extensive collection of the former Oldest Store.

"It's amazing to watch Monty paint those signs freehand," Old Town Trolleys Manager Dave Chatterton says.

"It will be a museum," he continues, "complete with period-dressed interpreters, offering pieces of rock candy to visitors and interpreting the various wares offered in the turn of the century store."

The building is the former Herbie Wiles' "House that Trust Built," moved from US 1 when the insurance agency planned a larger facility there.

450 - Many committees, more ideas

Commemoration Executive Director Dana Ste. Claire says 40 committees have been identified so far for our commemoration period beginning with the 500th anniversary of Ponce de Leon's discovery of Florida in 2013 and culminating with St. Augustine's 450th anniversary in 2015.

Voting for program and project ideas on the 450 Community Corps [website](#) indicates there will be plenty for those and more committees to do.

A period food festival, St. Augustine paper currency and coins, a Regatta, a replica 16th century ship, and U. S. Commemorative Stamps and Coins are among the most popular so far.

Other high-ranking choices include a Bayfront Bandshell, Period Clothes Closet, Lincolnville, a St. Augustine Film Commission, The Colonial Capitols of Florida, The Lightner Ball, The Mission Period, and Tour Guide Training.

The website's [Idea Vault](#) describes dozens of ideas submitted by our community, and voting on them will give an idea of our community's favorites.

History's Highlights

Lightner Museum a collection of collections

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

Cut glass and Tiffany, matchbooks and shaving mugs, Churchill's lion and an Egyptian mummy. Otto Lightner was a collector of collections, and well-financed by his newspaper acumen and Hobbies Magazine. He couldn't pass up a bargain, like the offerings of cash poor Chicago estates during the Great Depression.

"Otto Lightner was a consummate believer that everyone needed a hobby," Lightner Museum Director Bob Harper says. Practicing what he preached, "Lightner was also a consummate collector himself," says Harper.

Illness - recuperation from lymphatic cancer treatments - brought Otto Lightner to St. Augustine, and to the Ponce de Leon Hotel, where he noticed the Alcazar Hotel across King Street, closed since 1931. He quickly negotiated a \$125,000 price, with eager city officials chipping in the remaining \$25,000 of Florida East Coast Hotel Co.'s \$150,000 asking price.

The museum opened January 1, 1948, and Lightner promised an endowment "to assure and guarantee its success and perpetuity." But unfortunately, Otto Lightner died in 1950, before reflecting this in his will. The museum, however, was bequeathed to the people of St. Augustine, to be governed by a board of trustees.

After nearly two decades of struggling to survive, roof leaks and deterioration led to a 99-year lease with the city for \$100,000 in roof repairs and, two years later, in 1969, a \$2 million bond issue approved by voters to renovate the Alcazar Hotel and put the museum in order.

Volunteers rushed forward to organize the thousands of antiques and collectibles and create what many consider "The Smithsonian of the South," with today "between 40,000 and 50,000 antiques and collectibles," Harper says.

Volunteers continue to serve in the museum, and our Junior Service League, whose energy saved the St. Augustine Lighthouse years back, has taken on restoration of one of the museum's rooms and many of its treasures.

Our city hall today occupies the front, former hotel section of the building, while the museum occupies the former casino area, including the indoor pool, largest of its kind when completed in the late 1800s.



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

Email Marketing by

