



# THE ST. AUGUSTINE REPORT

Local news in our Nation's Oldest City



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

April 9 2010

## Bayfront Spanish Quarter entrance planned

A lease agreement to provide a sightseeing train/trolley stop and new entrance to the Spanish Quarter on Avenida Menendez - creating a more visible link between the Quarter and the Castillo - is on our CityCommission's agenda for Monday night.

The long-sought plan would develop the area between the White Lion Restaurant and Spanish Quarter for visitor drop-off, and provide direct access to the Quarter to visitors from the Castillo across Avenida Menendez.

Monday's agenda also includes resolutions seeking a 30-year lease of 34 state-owned historic properties here, and endorsement of efforts to establish Amtrak commuter rail service along Florida's east coast with a station at US 1 and Carrera Street.

Commissioners will also discuss hours of operation at Hamilton Upchurch Park and hear staff reports on funding for LED replacement lighting at our Visitor Center parking facility, and a \$250,000 grant for a pedestrian and transit study of the SR A1A corridor along our bayfront and San Marco Avenue.



Area of new Quarter entrance opposite Castillo



### ***Visible link for Castillo and Quarter***

The planned sightseeing vehicle stop and Spanish Quarter entrance opposite the Castillo on Avenida Menendez is on the commission's consent agenda - a portion of the meeting for actions which the city manager has set in place and are routinely approved, although a commissioner can ask that any item be pulled for discussion.

The stop and bayfront entrance has been long-contemplated. The area includes a small building adjacent to the White Lion Restaurant, and is owned by the Alexander family. City Manager Bill Harriss says the frontage will provide both ample pullout area for sightseeing vehicles and greater visibility for our Spanish Quarter.

### **City seeks 30-year property lease**

## **Tables are set for luncheons**

Our Woman's Exchange has the tables set in the garden at Pena Peck House for its annual Spring Luncheons on Tuesdays and Thursdays through April, beginning April 13.

The lunch - prepared and served by Woman's Exchange members - is \$20, and includes a coupon for shopping in the Pena Peck gift shop and Miss Anna's Boutique in the Old Kitchen.

The luncheons support Woman's Exchange programs, including maintenance of our city-owned Pena Peck House. Reservations through [The Woman's Exchange](#) 904-829-5064.

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When our city subleased the 34 state-owned historic properties from the state Division of Historical Resources a decade ago, the term was in five-year increments. Not a long enough time to encourage investment in major repairs, Mayor Joe Boles says.

Seven years ago, the city sought an annual state appropriation of \$1 million - similar to the program for 20 state-owned properties in Pensacola. When that failed, the University of Florida was asked to take over the properties. The university determined a need for \$27 million in repairs, and declined the takeover without funding.

The properties are owned by the state Internal Improvement Trust fund and leased to the state Division of Historical Resources until 2040. The city resolution proposes a lease through that period to allow "development of a private/public investment business plan for upgrading of the properties."

Our city hopes for an extended lease after 2040.

## **Resolution gets city on board Amtrak**

A resolution before commissioners would support High Speed Intercity Passenger Rail - Florida East Coast Amtrak Service under a Presidential Executive Order, and specify a station along U.S. 1 at Carrera Street.

Amtrak would operate the rail service along the Florida east coast, the Florida Department of Transportation would fund the project's capital improvements including basic stations, and the city would be responsible for maintaining the station facility and amenities.

A bid last year for stimulus funding for the rail service failed, but cities along the east coast are optimistic in this round.

# **Plaza probe draws interest of visitors**

## ***Aviles Street is next on schedule for city archaeologist's team***

City Archaeologist Carl Halbirt and his volunteer crew drew crowds during their recent exploration in our Plaza de la Constitución, a project cut short as Halbirt now shifts to the first block of Aviles Street to stay ahead of its redesign project.

Our city will be lifting the brick surface along Aviles Street, replacing utilities and resetting the brick, and extending the west sidewalk over existing parking spaces to provide space for outside dining tables.



**Youngsters gather to watch as City Archaeologist Halbirt works in Plaza**

# Pump out boat joins city fleet



Marina crew primed on pump out boat operation

A pump out boat joined the St. Augustine Marina fleet this week, in preparation for service when mooring fields are installed as part of our city's Harbor Management Plan.

Marina attendants went through a training session with a representative of [PumpOut USA](#) Wednesday, and will be continuing training with periodic boat service. A State Department of Environmental Protection grant covered three-quarters of the \$92,000 cost.

General Services Director Jim Piggott anticipates limited use of the boat until the mooring fields in the bay and Salt Run are completed.

## Mooring field schedule

Bids for our Harbor Management Plan mooring fields will be opened April 22, with installation beginning after July 4 and completion expected by the end of August, General Services Director Jim Piggott says.

"Waterfront residents can reserve moorings beginning June 1, city and county residents June 14, and all others beginning June 28 at the City marina, Piggott says. "Boats anchored in the mooring field areas should be prepared to move for a short time sometime after July 1. The city will make every effort to limit the time and distance boaters will be asked to move during the construction of the mooring fields."

Piggott added that dinghies at the Lighthouse boat ramp beach will also have to temporarily relocate by June 14 for construction of dinghy racks for mooring field users.

## A 16th Century Village proposed

Another ambitious idea has been added to the 450 Community Corps [Idea Vault](#) as a legacy project - those ideas designed as permanent additions to our heritage experience.

North Florida Militia and Men of Menendez founder Bob Hall has the vision - and supporting details - to recreate our city's first town settlement in 1580. It's a vision the late benefactor Lawrence Lewis first proposed decades ago, and could be sited in the Tolomato parking area off Spanish Street, Hall says.

Lewis had a 40-acre site north of our city in 1977. Hall's proposed site is smaller, but government-owned. Hall suggests visitors can enter the 16th century off Cordova Street, continue through the 17th century between Spanish and St. George streets, and into the 18th century Colonial Spanish Quarter.

His spiral-bound proposal booklet notes extensive research has already been done, and above-ground construction will not disturb archeology. "Most important," Hall says, "the proposal interprets the 16th Century which makes it unique in the nation and an ideal project for our 450th celebration."

Hall's proposal includes a three-page letter to Lewis stating, "After thoroughly reviewing the reports of Mr. Albert



Manucy and the Martin Agency, we believe St Augustine 1580 can be the most exciting restoration ever undertaken in this country."

The letter was written in 1977 and signed by Maureen and Joseph Boles Sr., parents of Mayor Joe Boles.

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

# ***The only recorded escape from the Castillo***

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

Today's "dressing up" of our venerable Castillo - including a new entry sign and coquina blocks along the time-worn gundeck - leaves intact original features, like the musket slits along its walls.

It was through one of these narrow slits, in the southwest corner facing Avenida Menendez, that 18 Seminole men and two women made the only recorded escape from the Castillo November 29, 1837.

Leading this seemingly impossible escape was Coacoochee, a warrior chief under the legendary Osceola. He was already imprisoned in the Castillo when Osceola, drawn to Moultrie Creek to parley with the American commander under a flag of truce, was captured. War-weary and suffering from quinsy - a throat infection - Osceola was not interested in the escape plan.



The southwest area of the fort was thought so escape-proof it was not even guarded. One would have to reach a slit in the fortress wall 15 feet above the floor - a slit five feet long, just eight inches wide, through six feet of coquina wall. On the other side was a 21-foot drop to the moat below. The slit was also blocked by two iron rods.

Given time, Coacoochee and his followers were able to pry one rod from the relatively soft coquina. The other, left in place, became a tie-off for a line which they dropped outside, then climbed down, leaping the final distance to the dry ditch below.

Coacoochee, an effective leader, continued battling the American forces for three and a half more years until, on June 4, 1841, he finally capitulated and was moved to a reservation in Oklahoma.

A Board of Inquiry could find no fault or evidence of assistance from the fort commander in the miraculous escape, and questions continue to this day how it was possible.

**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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