



# THE ST. AUGUSTINE REPORT

Local news in our Nation's Oldest City



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## St. Augustine Christmas 2009

St. Augustine's Nights of Lights blazes a trail into AAA's *12 Favorite Places to Catch the Holiday Spirit*

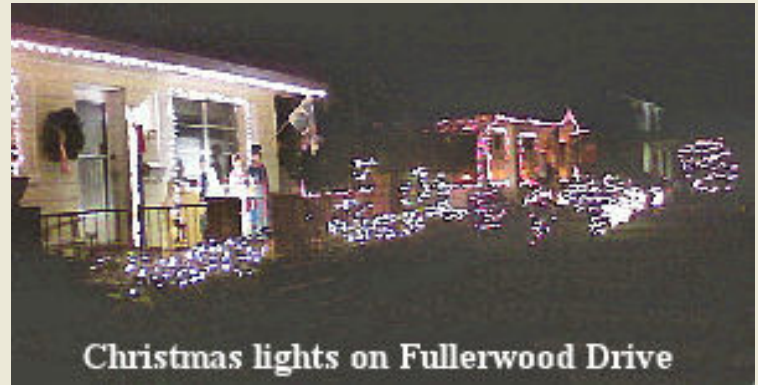
Our neighborhoods sparkle with an array of festive lighting

Our city workers have both Eve and Day off

500 more test our ParkNow cards for last minute shopping

Blizzard 2009 up north has a brief sequel here

And the year end holidays give brief respite to city boards and organizations working toward a better community.



Christmas lights on Fullerwood Drive



### Tracking Santa

NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command) is using four high-tech systems to track Santa's flight - radar, satellites, Santa Cams and fighter jets.

From radar strung along the northern border of North America, to satellites picking up the infrared signature of Rudolph's bright red nose, to Santa Cams - ultra-cool, high-tech, high-speed digital cameras pre-positioned around the world to capture images and videos of Santa's

### AAA - Nights of Lights are tops

Inspectors for the American Automobile Association (AAA) say our Nights of Lights is among the *12 Favorite Places to Catch the Holiday Spirit* across the U.S. and Canada.

"During this two-month long celebration, millions of white lights glow along the ancient streets and historic buildings of the oldest continually occupied European settlement in the continental United States," they report. "This year's Sixteenth Annual Nights of Lights traces its origins to the Spanish tradition of displaying a lighted white candle during the Christmas holidays." The complete top 12 list is [here](#).

### Our holiday schedule

All city offices will be closed Thursday, Christmas Eve, and Friday, Christmas Day. The normal Friday pickup of solid waste and recyclables moves to Saturday, December 26.

### Into our town drove the 500

If you planned to take advantage of our city's holiday gift *ParkNow* card, offered free to the first 500 who pay their utility bill in person during December, you're too late.

"They were lined up the first of December, and all 500 were gone within three days," Financial Services Group Manager Meredith Breidenstein told us.

A good sign in our city's continuing effort to get us used to the benefits

visit, and Canadian and American fighter jets to escort him about North America, our nation's greatest early warning system is in place.

Join the NORAD Santa tracking team on its [website](#).

of the ParkNow card - used like a credit card to cut our parking meter, terminal, and garage rates to 50 cents an hour.

Another effort to offset the "parking downtown's a bummer" image: the on-street parking limit has been increased from two to three hours. Off-street parking lots managed by our city have a four-hour limit.

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## ***Our lake runneth over***

Take a full moon, stir in northeast winds with some rain, raise tide to high, and you get Lake Maria Sanchez over-flowing at Cordova and St. Francis streets late last week.

"This is the highest tide we've seen without a hurricane," lakefront resident Joan Shannon tells us. "The moon, wind, rain = lots of water. (A) neighbor called to report an otter sighting early (Friday) a.m. My son saw it and I think I saw it swimming south."

City workers tell us both the recent bulkheading around the lake and the new weir controlling tidal flow are working well - but can only do so much.

Then again, they reminded us, it's a lot easier getting rid of this water than the snow they got up north.



Lake Maria Sanchez overflow last week

## **HARB - come back in January**

Our Historic Architectural Review Board (HARB) had a few comments, but no decisions, as it wrapped up its actions for 2009 last week.

Three items are described in The St. Augustine *Report's* Previous Issues (that link button in the left column above). On our city's plan for wayfinding signage (November 17 issue) - smaller, side-mounted versions would be more in keeping with our colonial feel; on Flagler College's proposed welcome center on Cordova Street (November 17 issue) - needs to more strongly reflect Spanish colonial architecture, and on fencing around the Constitution Monument in our Plaza de la Constitución (December 8 issue) - board member Len Weeks suggested a powder-coated aluminum fence in the middle of the plaza is wrong.

They're all expected back as HARB begins its new year January 21. The board meets at 2 p.m. in The Alcazar Room at City Hall.

## ***Starting over - Team helps ex-offenders***

They gather monthly in a conference room at the County Health Center, reviewing progress made, searching for better ways to lower the hurdles faced by ex-offenders leaving jail. December's Reentry Team meeting drew 16 representatives from a variety of community services.

Mary Lea Zamora and Aaron Robinson have been teaching a ten-week parent education program in St. Johns County's jail for several years. Mary Lea is a prevention support specialist with our county's Health and Human Services Community Resource Center; Aaron now works in Putnam County's public housing program.

"Our clients want to take a different path in their lives," Mary Lea says, "but they are confronted with so many issues upon exiting the jail that the difficulties can be insurmountable."

Their team has grown to include a faith-based career development specialist, a drop-in center volunteer, a parenting instructor, and representatives of EPIC and the St. Johns Sheriff's Office. Sheriff's Grant Administrator Linda Morrow has secured grants to establish a re-entry program, and a program director and employment specialist could be in its future.

"We know all these people are growing up into, or coming back to, our community with both needs to be met and gifts to share," Mary Lea says. "How can we all work together to ease the passage?"

Contact [Mary Lea](#) 904-209-6103 to sit in on a session or contribute ideas on the reentry effort.

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

### ***A grim Christmas here 307 years ago***

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

December 24, 1702. Christmas Eve, two sails are sighted. They are English. Morale inside the Castillo hits bottom. The ships have not come from Jamaica; they do not carry the dreaded bombs, but the defenders don't know this.

The governor focuses on morale: A Christmas Eve party for all and bonuses for the troops. His accountants say the treasury can't afford it.

The governor replies, "Charge it to next year's account!"

Five days later, the English siege on St. Augustine ends, a Spanish relief fleet from Havana forcing Carolina Governor James Moore to retreat and freeing 1,500 townspeople who were sheltered within the Castillo's protective walls for 55 days.

Moore had vowed, "I will not leave this city even if I lose my head."

Back in Charleston, Moore still has his head, but has lost face - as well as his governorship.



**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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