



St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners

Office of Public Affairs

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St. Johns County Cultural Events Division, Public Works Department and Housing and Community Services Receive Regional Excellence Awards *St. Johns County Programs Recognized by Northeast Florida Regional Council*

St. Augustine, FL – (March 2, 2010) – Three St. Johns County programs were recognized by the Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC) for excellence on February 24, 2010. The regional awards handed out were for excellence in economic development and tourism, environmental stewardship and affordable housing.

Economic Development

The excellence in economic development and tourism award was awarded to the St. Johns County Cultural Events Division. This division manages the highly successful St. Augustine Amphitheatre and other cultural facilities throughout St. Johns County. Since the renovated Amphitheatre opened in August 2007:

- 84 major concerts have been held with more than 163,000 tickets sold.
- The Cultural Events Division has hosted 160 non-for-profit events with an estimated attendance of 200,000 during the two-year period.
- Approximately 70 percent of concert attendees came from outside St. Johns County.

One of their most notable and successful undertakings has been the creation of Winter Wonderland. The 2009-2010 holiday season included the third annual Winter Wonderland Festival, which has grown and expanded each year. Winter Wonderland has drawn more than 70,000 people per year, with an astounding 53% coming from outside St. Johns County. The impact this brilliant venture has had on economic development and tourism in St. Johns County has been tremendous, and promises to be for many years to come.

Environmental Stewardship

The St. Johns County Public Works Department was awarded the environmental stewardship excellence award for its biodiesel fuel program. In 2005, St. Johns County initiated a project to process recycled waste vegetable oil into biodiesel fuel for use in

County equipment. Within one year, the first small quantities of biodiesel had been produced and successfully tested in select equipment. The potential for savings in fuel cost, and for positive environmental impacts, appeared substantial.

The County Commission approved and funded a plan in 2006 to collect donated recycled waste vegetable oil from residents, businesses and others, and then process it into biodiesel fuel. The biodiesel would then be blended with regular petroleum diesel and used in all County diesel vehicles and equipment.

The pilot project soon demonstrated that, while the basic process of producing biodiesel from waste vegetable oil is relatively simple, doing so in a manner that met industry quality standards was difficult. No precedent had been documented to date. After much work by County staff, in 2009 St. Johns County was able to consistently produce quality and compliant biodiesel from recycled waste vegetable oil.

The Public Works Department is now capable of producing over 35,000 gallons per year, or approximately 20 percent of the County's total diesel fuel consumption. Benefits of the biodiesel program include reduced fuel costs for the County, as well as significant reductions in local sewage overflows due to less commercial disposal of fats, oils and grease.

Affordable Housing

St. Johns County Housing and Community Services were presented the affordable housing excellence award by the NEFRC. This award recognized the efforts of the department and more specifically of staff member Dana Moore, Administrator of Homeownership Programs. Moore was recognized for her effort and approach towards the use of the county's credit counseling resources and funds to assist individuals in saving their homes from foreclosure.

In the summer of 2008, Moore recognized that the increasing volume of foreclosures would require a unique approach for the county's credit counseling resources and funds to assist individuals in preserving their homes. She implemented the Foreclosure Intervention Program in September 2008, which utilized and expanded the County's relationship with the non-profit St. Johns Housing Partnership. Funded through County funds, SHIP and NeighborWorks, credit counseling is now made available to low and moderate income households in danger of losing their homes.

The program has been so successful that courts now are referring cases back to the St. Johns Housing Partnership to ensure that every possible opportunity is given to preserve a client's ability to remain in their home prior to foreclosure. As a result of Moore's leadership, 234 families in St. Johns County have been able to remain in their homes since September 2008.

The three award recipients were also recognized at the beginning of the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners meeting on March 2, 2010. St. Johns County is proud to have three diverse public programs honored by the Northeast Florida Regional Council for excellence in their respective categories.

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