

# P R E S S R E L E A S E



**Date:** November 13, 2015  
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Contact:** Brian Teeple  
Chief Executive Officer  
(904) 279-0880

## Northeast Florida Regional Council Announces its Northeast Florida Regional Leadership Award Winners

In response to the high level of Regional Excellence in a variety of critical arenas, in 2003 the Northeast Florida Regional Council (NEFRC) launched a Regional Leadership Awards Program. The presentation event will take place this year on December 3rd. The event will mark the 13th year the Awards Ceremony has been held in conjunction with a reception honoring elected officials throughout the Region. The 2015 award winners are as follows:

**Category:** Affordable Housing  
**Putnam County Habitat for Humanity**

Putnam Habitat for Humanity under the direction of Jim Melfi until his recent retirement, and now under the leadership of Executive Director Ramicah Watkins, has been focused on housing the needy in Putnam County. Since 1991, a total of 45 houses have been built and over 200 have been repaired. The non-profit agency promotes and advocates for affordable housing, seeking partnerships with community leaders, NPOs, homeowners and businesses to advance safe and affordable housing for all in Putnam County. The agency runs programs supporting veterans and the elderly and partners with other providers to ensure that the full range of needs are met.



**Category:** Economic Development & Tourism  
**Downtown Jacksonville CRA Plans & BID Strategy**

By unifying the Community Redevelopment Area Plans, the Business Investment and Development Strategy, and past planning documents, such as the Downtown Master Plan, into single Business Improvement District Plan, The Downtown Investment Authority and the City ensured that urban planning and economic development efforts are inextricably tied. Further, by combining multiple economic development incentive funding mechanisms into a single BID Plan, the City and DIA utilize unified decision-making criteria and performance-based benchmarking. This action has made an impact on the community, utilized an array of funding mechanisms, created a template applicable to other communities and advanced economic investment in Downtown Jacksonville including over \$4 million in investments within the first 8 months of the plan approval.



**Category:** Historic Preservation or Adaptive Reuse  
**Phil McDaniel, St. Augustine Distillery**

The historic FP&L ice plant built in 1907 is listed on the National Historic Register. Phil McDaniel restored and converted the vacant building into a distillery, tourist destination (tours and museum) and restaurant that serves spirits distilled from locally grown sugar cane, wheat, corn and citrus. Promoting sustainable agriculture, St. Augustine Distillery is a modern take on historic practices to challenge the current method of commercially produced spirits and to breathe new life into the community.



**Category:** Education  
**Dr. John Ruis, Nassau County School Superintendent**

Dr. Ruis has served the Nassau County school system for 40 years as teacher, coach, and administrator. He served the last 17 years as Superintendent. He has had leadership roles in a variety of community organizations including the YMCA, Communities in Schools, Boys' and Girls' Club, Upward Basketball, and American Cancer Society. He has transformed the Nassau County School District to an “A” rated school district – 4<sup>th</sup> among the 67 counties in the state. Dr. Ruis has also partnered with Florida State College at Jacksonville to build a joint-use career and technology center, with the Boys' and Girls' Club to build a facility on a school campus, and with Terra Pointe, LLC to build an elementary school in a residential/commercial development that will come on-line in 2017.



**Category:** Environmental Stewardship  
**Captain Howard Wanamaker, Commanding Officer NAS Jacksonville**

Naval Air Station Jacksonville Commanding Officer Captain Howard Wanamaker leads a station committed to “greening” its facilities, properties, and operations. NAS Jacksonville contains over 24,000 acres with 20,000 military, civilian and contractor personnel as the third largest US Naval installation in the world. The station has made partnerships with Emergency Management Committee of the NEFRC to study Sea Level Rise, is a founding partner of Jacksonville University’s Sustainability degree Program and is a partner with community and state groups to study sustainable landscaping on site. NAS Jacksonville is a regional leader advancing in the areas of wastewater reuse, treatment, clean marina, LEED construction, energy use reductions and educational outreach.



**Category:** Planning & Growth Management  
**Island Walk Shopping Center Redevelopment**

Island Walk, a 28.7 acre shopping center, has been redeveloped through a partnership with the City and the property owner, Branch Properties. This redevelopment is showcase project for city-wide strategic planning goals identified in Prosperity 2021, the Strategic



Action Plan and the Parkway East District Plan that center on maintaining the relevance, functionality and appearance of all parts of the city, including its older areas. Island Walk represents one of many keystone projects undertaken to maintain the quality of the Parkway East community as it matures, which is reflected in a focused directive in the City's Strategic Action Plan: keeping older neighborhoods attractive and relevant. An early indicator of the success of this project is that more than 80 percent of the available square footage has been pre-leased according to the property owner, inclusive of new major tenants for the existing large retail spaces that were planned to remain.

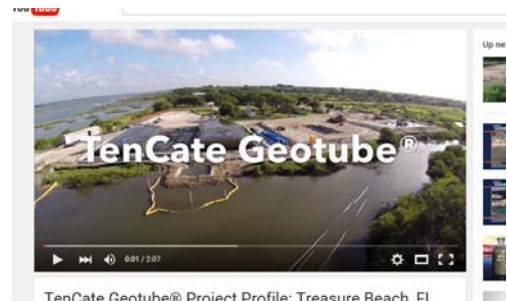
**Category: Public Safety**  
**Hurricane Awareness Tour Stop**

NOAA Hurricane experts visited five US East Coast cities and one in Canada with St. Augustine as one of the chosen spots to promote hurricane awareness. The Hurricane Hunter aircraft stopped at the NEFL Regional Airport in St. Augustine. The Jacksonville office of the National Weather Service and St. Johns County Emergency Management organized the event with school students visiting to learn about science and hurricane preparedness. This nomination recognized the partnership with St. Johns County Emergency Management, the National Weather Service, the US Coast Guard, NOAA, Florida Army National Guard, St. Johns Fire Rescue and St. Augustine Fire Department.



**Category: Quality of Life**  
**Treasure Beach Canals Dredging**

Treasure Beach is a community in St. Johns County with five and a half miles of canals connecting 455 lots with the Intracoastal Waterway. The subdivision was platted in 1968/69, and over time, the canals became in need of dredging. At the urging of the Property Owners Association, the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners passed a resolution providing notice of intent to create an MSBU and directed County staff to hold multiple public meetings and provide petitions to determine support from the affected property owners. The County worked together with the citizens and property owners to develop and implement an innovative solution to a problem the property owners could not solve on their own. The project was completed under budget. The canals are now unclogged and should provide years of service to this waterfront community, enhancing property values and quality of life.



**Category: Transportation**  
**Putnam County Commissioner Nancy Harris**

Commissioner Harris is relentless in her commitment to supporting her constituents by working to ensure mobility options remain open to them. Commissioner Harris has been the Chair of the Putnam County Local Coordination Board since 2007. During her tenure, she has provided visionary leadership and inspiration. She led the Board in creation of a rider's survey, which provides a way to tell the story of the real people being served by transportation disadvantaged programs. Commissioner Harris urged the Northeast Florida Regional Council consider a resolution outlining their support for regional transit. This was unanimously approved and it is a testament to the Commissioner that urban counties



agree on the importance of rural transit. As a longstanding former member of the NEFRC, it is also a testament to their respect for her as a colleague.

**Category: Regional Leadership**  
**Mayor Jon Netts**

Jon Netts personifies the essence of a Mayor who unites his constituents and assures that Palm Coast has meaningful input into all that is happening in the Northeast region of Florida. Always with an eye on the bigger picture, Mayor Netts stays true to his belief that ‘We are part of a region. What they do affects us and what we do affects them. What we do together, we do better than if we try to do it alone.’ Mayor Netts has served nine years on the Northeast Florida Regional Council and was recently elected as chair of their non-profit policy affiliate, the Regional Community Institute. He also serves as a Commissioner on the Florida Inland Navigation District. Under Mayor Nett’s leadership, the City has received two Gold and one Silver Designation Certifications for Green Local Governments for the Florida Green Building Coalition and is now ranked third in all of Florida; bringing pride and recognition to the Northeast region. Additional sustainability awards during his tenure include the Outstanding Sustainability Initiative Award from the Florida Planning and Zoning Association (Surfcoast Chapter) and three NEFRC Awards for Excellence in Environmental Stewardship.



**Category: Special Achievement**  
**City of St. Augustine Downtown Improvement District & 450<sup>th</sup> Commemoration**

The St Augustine Downtown Improvement District is a product of the 1995 Vision plan to improve streets and encourage pedestrian access through the historic district. St. Augustine is a historic destination attracting visitors, residents, and businesses. The City revitalized Aviles Streets years back into a “streatery”. This plan improved the western entrance to the historic district with financial contributions by the property owners benefiting from the improvements. Improvements were completed in time for the 450<sup>th</sup>! Commemoration, celebrating St. Augustine as the oldest continuously- occupied city in the United States. The city celebrated its 450<sup>th</sup> anniversary by organizing a weeklong series of events to focus on the city’s culture and heritage. Education was a key component of this commemoration. This special achievement was defined by three themes - Tapestry: the Cultural Threads of First America Exhibition, Celebrate 450! and a visit from the King and Queen of Spain. This impressive volunteer effort shows the dedication of a community to celebrating its past and working together to ensure the quality of its future.

