

# San Marco Times

The Official Newsletter of the San Marco Preservation Society

June 2005

## 2004-2005 Beautification Award Winners

by Mike Boyles

Each year, San Marco Preservation Society recognizes outstanding improvements to our community by awarding the annual "Beautification Awards" for superior renovations, restorations, construction and landscape improvements. This year our special awards and gratitude for improvements go to:

### Parks

Jim Rink Park  
Rink Design

Preservation Hall Cottage  
San Marco Preservation Society



River Road



San Marco Boulevard



Dunsford Road



River Oaks Road



San Marco Boulevard



Saratoga Drive

### Residential

The Lofts San Marco,  
Cesery Companies  
1450 Flagler Avenue

Bill and Mary Jaycox  
1840 River Road

Greg and Ginger Forbes  
907 Vale Orchard Road

Doug and Christine Sasser  
951 Saratoga Drive

John Pauley and  
Linda Strickland  
1026 Sorrento Road

Bill and Carol Foley  
3500 Sunnyside Drive

Dick Cook  
1917 San Marco Boulevard

Dr. Joel David  
1887 San Marco Boulevard

Kevin McLaughlin  
1923 Dunsford Road

Nicole Portnoy  
1911 Dunsford Road

Kirby Hamilton and  
Company, Inc.  
1019 Colombo Street

Bill and Judy Wren  
1024 River Oaks Road

Nola Peterson  
1604 Sheridan Street

San Marco Times is the news and information publication of San Marco Preservation Society. Send change of address notices to the San Marco Preservation Society, 1652 Atlantic Blvd., Jacksonville, FL 32207

**Preservation Hall** 396-4734  
Office Hours: Tues & Thurs  
9 am - 2 pm

**Preservation Hall Coordinator**  
Laura Chepenik 396-9534

**President**  
Tim Martin 396-9050

**President-Elect**  
Rob Smith 399-0342

**Secretary**  
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**Membership Administration**  
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Cynthia Murray 396-4890

**Public Relations**  
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Stephanie Edwards 398-1971

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Lori Boyer 398-1194

**Director Emeritus**  
Barbara Puckett 398-4989  
Zim Boulos

**Special Projects:**  
*So Jax City Hall*  
Jennifer Newman/Keith Kimall

**Luminaria**  
Linda Strickland 396-7645

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# President's Letter

Dear Neighbors,

What a busy and exciting year this has been! I began my term with several overriding goals: to inform and involve more of our community in San Marco Preservation Society; to streamline SMPS board meetings and shift some of the responsibilities of the officers back to the Board and its committees; and to pass and implement changes to the zoning code that would reinstate original setback, height, and lot coverage regulations in place of the generally applicable City zoning standards.



This year we have hosted three program meetings open to anyone interested in attending with guest speakers Mayor Peyton, Michael Kelly (Superbowl Committee Chairman), and Councilman Shad, and our annual general membership meeting. At each of these meetings we have reported on the activities and projects of SMPS. We have distributed our newsletter this year to all addresses in the community rather than just members in an effort to reach out to those unaware of our efforts on their behalf. We have organized a number of project specific committees and hosted another successful Tour of Homes, which together have involved more than fifty volunteers new to SMPS this year. And, we hosted the popular Concert in the Park with Noel Friedline as well as the Dog Parade and Remote-controlled Boat Regatta which were attended by members and non-members alike. I believe these were all steps in the direction of broadening our base in the community. Our membership numbers have grown in response. I remain concerned however over the number of neighbors who seem completely unaware of, or misguided concerning, what SMPS does. Communication seems to still be a problem. For example, recently a petition was circulated opposing a fence at Largo Park. To my knowledge, no board member was ever contacted in advance. Had there been better communication it would have been learned that SMPS had not proposed or even discussed a fence for Largo Park. Clearly, we need to work harder at making our plans known and ourselves accessible to our neighbors.

Our Board meetings have been reduced to approximately one and one-half hours in length by shifting more discussion and planning to the committee levels. A number of committees have been very effective, not only in involving new people, but also in completing assigned tasks. For example, the Historian and her committee have researched, written, and completed a new brochure on San Marco historic points of interest. Some committees never got off the ground due to a lack of volunteers and the chair shouldered the entire job. Others struggled with the boundaries of autonomy and authority, unsure as to which decisions or actions required Board approval. Again, while there is more work to be done in this area, the process is moving in a positive direction.

Finally, after numerous well attended and productive neighborhood meetings, the Zoning Overlay for greater San Marco was adopted last fall. The scope and effectiveness of the overlay has been tested by a number of recent building permits and AD requests. The ordinance has been successful in impacting the siting and height of additions and new construction. It is a very positive tool. While it has been noted that not every setback for every lot was individually articulated, the ordinance does provide that current zoning applies in those cases so there are no "overlooked" lots. And, the administrative deviation process exists so that unique circumstances can be examined and properly addressed. Nevertheless, there is some neighborhood disappointment over what the overlay does not do in practice. Two recent situations on Sorrento Road illustrate the point. First, the ordinance does not prevent demolition of beautiful historic homes. Secondly, it does not preclude new construction much larger in scale and mass than original construction, so long as setbacks, height, and lot coverage are maintained. Finally, it does not preclude construction of two homes on two original lots, even if one of those lots was previously treated like a side yard to an original home. The issues of preserving historic structures themselves and the mass and character they impart to the neighborhood are truly the heart of an historic preservation ordinance. This year SMPS began a concerted effort to encourage historic designation of *individual* homes and businesses. We urge you to elect this status for your own property if you are concerned about the demolitions and new construction you see elsewhere in San Marco.

In addition, we have worked on many exciting projects this year ranging from park improvements to the Town Center initiative that will dramatically change the look of Atlantic Boulevard next year. We have added more public art to the Square and the Library/Community Center and are continuing to pursue funding for the renovation of South Jacksonville City Hall. We monitor commercial development plans for large tracts in the area, improvements to Hendricks Avenue, and maintain Preservation Hall and the adjacent Stockton Cottage. We take pride in San Marco's status as a premier Jacksonville neighborhood and hope you do, too. Please volunteer to help by donating your time and talent. Call any Board member or sign up at our next general meeting.

Thank you for this opportunity to serve as President of such a great organization and thanks to my Board members and all committee members and volunteers who made this year such a success!

Best Regards

*Lori Nemeyer Boyer*

## San Marco Preservation Society Receives Funding for the South Jacksonville City Hall

by Jennifer Newman

**We have the funding!** We have just learned that the State Legislature approved funding of \$12,500,000 for 47 Special Category Projects, as recommended by the Florida Historical Commission. Our grant request of \$235,870 for South Jacksonville City Hall was #38. Two other projects in Duval County were also funded. The overall level of funding is a very pleasant surprise, as the legislature has been appropriating \$4 to 5 million for historic preservation grants in the last few years.

As you know from newsletters over the last couple of years,

SMPS has been working with the City in an attempt to restore the South Jacksonville City Hall. This rare reminder of the days when this area was a separate city is located at 1462 Hendricks Avenue.

In the meantime, the building had serious moisture problems and was deteriorating; by the time we received funding, if nothing was done, the amount of the grant would not have been enough to complete the repairs. City Council approved an expenditure last year of \$81,100 to stabilize the building. Subcontractors hired by the City have recently completed the

following projects: adding a new roof and capping the chimneys; re-mortaring all of the exterior bricks; and replacing all of the windows. The building is now water-tight and when you drive by, its street appearance is much improved, with the new mortaring and freshly painted new windows. Without this financial support from the City, our chances of receiving this grant would have been greatly reduced.

Thanks to everyone who has worked hard to bring us to this point. We will keep you posted on the status of this very exciting project as we know more.

## Treaty Oak at Jessie Ball du Pont Park

by Cynthia Murray

This majestic oak with its grandly spreading branches stands in the Jessie Ball du Pont Park located at 1123 Prudential Drive on the Southside. Legends say that Native American peace accords were signed under its limbs. The seven acre parcel of land which comprises the park was given to the city in 1964 by the du Pont family with the proviso that it would always be a park. The tree is not quite 200 years old. Its twisting branches have served as a local landmark over many years.

The Treaty Oak was decorated with hundreds of electrical lights when it once stood in Dixieland Park. Dixieland Park opened Saturday March 9, 1907 to large

crowds of people. The program on that day included gala concerts by the Dixieland Band, the celebrated Zeno-Jordan-Zeno Troupe ("greatest acrobats of the world"), South African Ostrich Farm, children's play ground and grand illumination of 14,000 lamps at 6 p.m. Admission was 10 cents. The following Monday night, March 11, De Wolf Hopper and opera company of seventy performed in the Dixie Theater. Reserved seats cost \$1.50 and \$2. It was boasted that the \$1 seats were as good as the reserved seats in the



theater, because it had been built to enable every visitor to overlook the whole stage. The ferry boats left the foot of Main St and Park Dock every

7 minutes to carry people across the St Johns River to attend the Park. Dixieland Park sprawled over several acres of riverfront property on the Southbank in the area where the Hilton Hotel is today. This early day amusement park featured a roller coaster and merry-go-round among its many attractions. Dixieland Park faded into history around WW1.

## Premier Event Location -

If you are planning a wedding, family reunion or any other social event, you will want to check out the facilities at the San Marco Preservation Society Hall located at 1652 Atlantic Blvd.

The beautiful wood-lined interior of the chapel is a treasure to behold and the Stockton Cottage next door adds space available for staging an event.

The Hall and Cottage are available for rent as follows: \$400 for a 4 hour period, \$500 for a 6 hour period and \$700 for a full day. You may contact Laura Chepnik at the Hall on Tuesdays and Thursdays between the hours of 9 am to 2 pm for further information. The phone number is 396-4734.



## Crape Myrtle Mangling

By Rob Smith, Landscape Architect

If you have Crape (or Crepe, either is correct) Myrtles in your yard, PLEASE don't allow them to be "hat racked". Hat racking is the practice of trimming all the limbs back to the original trunk year after year. Somewhere, sometime, someone decided that this form of tree abuse will encourage the tree to bloom more profusely (it was probably the landscape maintenance people who decided that this "art-form" was a sure money maker).

The practice of continually cutting back Crape Myrtles results in a tree that will be unhealthy and shorter lived. It also results in trees that are oddly shaped with small new branches emerging from large core trunks.

Crape Myrtles can and should be trimmed to maintain shape and size. The rule of thumb is to trim all of the old bloom pods and as much as one third to one half of last year's growth. The trees will bloom profusely this summer.



*Improperly pruned crape myrtle*



*Properly pruned crape myrtle*

*Thank You* to the committee members who worked on the "Points of Interest in San Marco" brochure —Barbara Puckett, Karen Barakat and Eileen Raynor. We have been meeting over the past year on a regular basis and spent many hours on this project which is now at the printer.

Also, *Thank You* to Louis Zelenka, Jr. for his contribution of San Marco historical articles which he wrote for our newsletter, the "San Marco Times." He spent many hours researching and writing. We are extremely grateful for his work and wish him well in his retirement.

*Cynthia Murray*, Historian

### 50 Years Residence Awards

This award is given at the SMPS annual meeting to honor families, churches and businesses who have remained in the same location for 50 or more years. This kind of stability and commitment to our neighborhood has been a major factor in keeping San Marco as such a desirable home for all generations. Those who received awards at the 2005 general meeting were:

*Helen P. Diamond and the late Frank E. Diamond*, at 977 Waterman Road, North since 1953

*Gatba and Kathryn Gilbert*, at 1751 Belmonte Avenue since 1955

*Claire Gray Scott*, 1124 Oriental Gardens Road since 1955

### 80 Years of Service to the Community

*Swaim Memorial Methodist Church*, at 1620 Naldo Avenue since 1925

### 50 Years Living in San Marco

*Matt Carlucci*

*Michael T. Carlucci*

## SAN MARCO LIVE OAK SALE

For a limited time, oak trees will be available at wholesale prices to San Marco area residents. Here is a unique opportunity! Have 12' tall oaks planted in your yard at wholesale price and help keep San Marco's lovely tree canopy full and healthy! San Marco Preservation Society and Greenscape of Jacksonville, Inc have joined Davey Tree Experts to offer:

LIVE OAK trees - 3" cal./ 12'H @\$475.00 includes planting with fertilizer, staking kit, mulch layer on top

OVER-CUP OAK trees - 3" cal./12'H @ \$425.00 includes planting with fertilizer, staking kit, mulch layer on top

Gator Bags (green bags hung on trees to be filled with water which slowly leaks out over several days) can be rented for \$20 each.

Trees will be planted in your yard at the end of July, before the August rains. Don't miss this opportunity to enhance your home. Encourage your neighbors to participate. Your check will reserve your tree(s). Send your check to Margaret Rush Copeland, 2746 White Oak Lane, 32207 396-5778

## FROM OUR PAST: Mitchell used wealth for Jacksonville's good

By Leni Bessette and Loise Stanton Warren -  
Reprinted with permission

Martha Reed Mitchell, a large woman with brilliant, blue eyes who lived largely and built largely, was perhaps the biggest thing to hit Jacksonville since the city's beginnings.

Her style fit her role as wife of Alexander Mitchell, multimillionaire, banker, insurance man and railroad mogul of Milwaukee and namesake of Mitchell, S.D., where the citizens built the Mitchell Corn Palace, primarily of corn, to prove the fertility of South Dakota soil.

If the Corn Palace weren't enough inspiration for Mrs. Mitchell to build the most palatial of southern mansions, Villa Alexandria in South Jacksonville (now San Marco), perhaps it was to house her social fortunes as mother of U.S. Senator John Lendrum Mitchell from Wisconsin and sister of Harrison Reed, first Florida governor after the Civil War.

Given the disruptions of the times, perhaps Reed should not be designated a carpetbagger or blamed for his several impeachments and removals from gubernatorial office, but he was.

Nonetheless, he found a comfortable home on the banks of the St. Johns River in South Jacksonville, and Mrs. Mitchell moved right in beside him and his 12 acres on her own 140 acres of prime riverfront property, now at the curve of Arbor Lane and River Road.

Hers was called one of the premier villas of the world. Today's River Road was her carriage way. Her boathouse, the size of some hotels, stood along the beaches of the river estate.

The villa's extensive orange groves bore fruit for her favorite charities in Wisconsin and Florida as she drilled wells for fountains, pools and artificial streams. The grounds also featured palm-shaded terraces, huge century plants and numerous varieties of vegetation. It is said that chips from her marble fountains still turn up in present-day yards.

However, it was the opulent interior that inspired the most reverence, with well-appointed art and furniture from Mitchell's many travels. She crossed the ocean 18 times, equaling roughly 4 1/2 months en route to somewhere.

Mitchell's bedroom, with hand-carved decorative woodwork, displayed a prominent bay window facing the river, hung with white silk curtains and over-drapes of blue brocade. Three steps from the hall led up to her bedroom, which some said led to her throne.

Meanwhile, the Mitchell mansion in Milwaukee occupied an entire city block, and still survives as the Wisconsin Club, but

when Alexander Mitchell died in 1887, Martha Reed Mitchell made Villa Alexandria her permanent home. So, with a large heart and all the money in the world, she began to concentrate her largesse on the city of Jacksonville.

A relative newcomer to the city in the mid to late 1860s, Mitchell had co-founded the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, which saved George Washington's home as an early act of historic preservation. In Jacksonville, she was in a position to sustain such emerging charities as the St. Luke's Hospital Association, with its formative hospital plans, and was elected that association's president. She held the position for 25 years.

She regularly opened her villa for dazzling parties to benefit the new hospital and All Saints Episcopal Church, and people flocked across the river, like Vikings in their lighted boats, to experience and enjoy the luxury.

Not only was Mitchell's pocketbook full, her spirit was generous. Probably able to pay for the new hospital outright, instead Mitchell performed hands-on nursing with the hospital's three founders, prominent women of means whom she could also buy outright. Nursing the sick and unfortunate was a scandalous undertaking for such women at the time.

Mitchell, a devout Episcopalian, labored tirelessly when South Jacksonville was blossoming to establish All Saints, donating the organ, furniture, vestments and everything else needed. She also contributed by inviting the Ladies' Guild to meet at her home, where, with business concluded, she entertained by reading aloud the travel diary she'd recorded while sailing up the Nile.

Mitchell is buried at Historic St. Nicholas Cemetery, founded by pioneer families in the 1840s. The site is now secured, but after the horse escaped the barn: Mitchell's marble slab monument is now scattered in multiple pieces, the result of vacuous vandalism. The memorial's inscription can be read as a puzzle, by reassembling broken pieces: "E'en as she trod her way to God, so walked she from her birth, in gentleness and simpleness with honor and clean mirth. She was born in Westford, Massachusetts, March 14, 1818, died at Villa Alexandria, February 14, 1902."



Margaret Reed Mitchell, from  
Jacksonville Architectural Digest

## APRIL BOARD MEETING

**Southside City Hall**— State representative, Dick Kravitz, sent Lori a letter to report that funding has been recommended by the budget committee for the renovation of SS City Hall. The City has agreed to the additional concession we requested on the Lease.

**Publix/Shopping Center**— The Sembler Company was scheduled to meet with Wachovia Bank and has said that they would like to meet with SMPS to discuss the design plan for the building. We have not yet heard from them.

**Hugh Nicholson (Sculptor of the Lions)**— The copyright material is not yet available.

**City Parks Task Force**— With the City's proposal regarding the proposed changes, there are two concerns:

1. The task force's proposal would restructure the Parks Department in that they will operate with a governing board with a citywide view of the parks.

2. San Marco parks could lose under the terms of the plan because the worst parks will receive City monies for improvements first to bring them up to a higher standard.

**Zoning**— Property located at 1002 Sorrento Rd. is scheduled for demolition and construction of a new residence. The Board voted to oppose the administrative deviations the owner has sought for the new construction

**Membership / Events**— All is going well for the "Music in the Park" event planned for Friday evening, April 15, 2005, 5 p. m. in Fletcher Park.

**Historian**— The "Points of Interest" brochure material is currently being printed.

**Preservation Hall / Maintenance**— Chairs in the Hall are breaking and we need to consider replacing them. It was recommended that the Hall and Cottage be rented together by adding the \$100 rental amount for the Cottage to the total rental fee and was approved by the Board.

**Grants**— Lori reported that SMPS will not be receiving the Cultural Council grant for the park concert. It may be possible that we will receive a grant for other activities this summer.

**Merchant Liaison**— Stephanie Edwards reported the Merchants Association is planning a San Marco Square "al fresco" event for the 3rd Saturday each month in the Square. The Merchants plan to stay open late and have music and entertainment in the Square.

**Parks**— We are submitting matching grant application for Landon Park. Fletcher Park - A plan is being drawn up for Fletcher Park to include a parking area on the back of the property. A unanimous vote was taken by the Board to use our funds toward putting in a parking area for Fletcher Park. Tree replacement is still proceeding in Southside Park. The fountain pump needs to be repaired in Balis Park. The Lions pump is also not working. There is a problem with the irrigation valves at Davin Park. Some of the neighbors around this park have requested historic street lights for this area.

**Landmark Designation**— We are working with homeowners who wish to obtain landmark designation for their homes.

The date for the unveiling of the sculpture in front of Theatre Jax is June 10. We are looking into preparing a design for a kiosk in the Square.



### The Third Annual Boat Regatta

sponsored by San Marco Preservation Society was a wonderful neighborhood gathering. Young and old alike enjoyed the remote control boats which set to sea in the Duck Pond.

### Happenings in the Square-

The San Marco Merchants Association will be hosting "Family Fun Day" in Balis Park on the **3rd Saturday of each month** during the summer.

Merchants will also be participating in "Christmas in July" which will take place on **July 16** - get your shopping done early!

### "The Jester" is Coming -

The latest piece of public art will be installed and dedicated on June 10 in front of Theatre Jax. The title of the sculpture is "The Jester" and one that is sure to please all.

Join us for the 2nd Annual Independence Day Parade to be held on **July 4th, 2005 at 10:00 a.m.** in Granada Park.

Bring your bike, wagon, stroller, skates, dogs and walking shoes decorated for the 4th.



*Balloons, Popsicles, Hotdogs and more.*

### FUN FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY!

A Neighborhood Parade that your kids will always remember!

*The San Marco Merchants Association is selling limited edition posters depicting San Marco. The proceeds from the sale of the posters goes to beautification of the Square. Get yours before they are all gone!*



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