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St. Augustine 459th Anniversary Celebrated with Founder's Day and Cultural Events

The Nation's Oldest City celebrates founding of San Agustín settlement and Sister City anniversary with Aviles, Spain

St. Augustine, Fla. (August 20, 2024) – Spain's long and rich history on Florida's Historic Coast began with a momentous step from ship to shore on September 8, 1565. The nation's Oldest City and The Diocese of St. Augustine celebrate the 459th anniversary of Founder's Day, and the 100th anniversary of St. Augustine's sister city's relationship with Aviles, Spain.

Forty-two years before Jamestown and fifty-five years before the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock, the Spanish landed on the shores of what would become St. Augustine under the leadership of Don Pedro de Menéndez de Avilés. King Philip II had sent Menéndez on a mission to rout the French from the area, keeping Spanish trade and exploration routes to Central and South America clear from interference. The Spanish brigade spotted land on the feast day of San Agustín and landed with over 600 voyagers. Father Francisco Lopez de Mendoza immediately held the first Catholic mass in what would eventually become the United States, giving thanks for the successful voyage, and celebrated with the New World's first Thanksgiving meal.

On Saturday, September 7 beginning at 10 a.m. dedicated historical reenactors dressed in full, traditional Spanish garb, will reenact the historic arrival of Pedro Menendez, as Menendez and his crew step foot on the grounds of the Mission Nombre de Dios. Following the historic landing, there will be a celebration Mass of Thanksgiving, led by Bishop Erik Pohlmeier at the Rustic Altar in its natural outdoor surroundings. Afterward, the celebration continues with a grand procession, cannon and musket salutes, and a Thanksgiving meal on the grounds of the Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park, the site of the first Spanish settlement.

This important celebration of Founder's Day also commemorates the 100th anniversary of St. Augustine's sister-city relationship with Menéndez's ancestral home of Avilés, Spain. A delegation from St. Augustine, led by the Mayor of St. Augustine, Nancy Sikes-Kline and Father John Tetlow, rector of the Cathedral Basilica, visited Spain to participate a wreath-laying ceremony and a visit to the Church of San Antonio de Padua, where Menéndez is buried. A delegation from Avilés will visit St. Augustine to participate in the annual Founder's Day events.

Celebratory events that mark the founding of St. Augustine between September 5 and 8.

Thursday, September 5

7 p.m. | Public concert by Asturian folk band Tejedor at Lewis Auditorium, Free

Friday, September 6

10 a.m. | Mayor Nancy Sikes-Kline will officially welcome the delegation from Avilés, Spain, at a wreath-laying ceremony in front of City Hall, at the statue of Don Pedro Menendez de Avilés

Saturday, September 7:

10 a.m. | Menendez and crew land at Mission Nombre de Dios grounds, FREE

11 a.m. | Catholic Mass at Rustic Altar on Mission grounds, FREE (bring a folding chair)

12 p.m. | Procession from Mission to Fountain of Youth, FREE

1 p.m. | Reenactment of first Thanksgiving meal at Fountain of Youth, (regular admission applies).

1– 5 p.m. | Encampment and weapons demonstrations at Fountain of Youth Archeological Park (regular admission applies).

8 p.m. | Sing Out Loud Festival and the Colonial Oak Music Park will host Asturian folk band Tejedor, FREE

Sunday, September 8

10 a.m. | Unveiling of a 100th Anniversary interpretive marker and rededication of a tile mosaic previously gifted to the City, FREE

Noon- 8 p.m. | Aviles Street Festival Celebrating the 100th Anniversary of Aviles/St. Augustine Sister Cities, FREE

2 p.m. | Tejedor Performs at the Gazebo on the Plaza de la Constitucion, then at 3 p.m. on Aviles Street

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