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MISSION SAN LUIS

THE PATEL
CONSERVATORY

ARTS RECOGNITION
SCHOLARSHIP
PROGRAM

SMALL TOWN
TREASURES IN
CENTRAL FLORIDA

MISSION SAN LUIS

The Jewel of Florida's Colonial Mission Chain



Last year in Southern California, nearly 600,000 people visited the Spanish mission of San Juan Capistrano. Yet few Americans are aware of the more than one hundred Spanish missions that existed in Florida 150 years *before* their better-known California counterparts. Mission San Luis, in present day Tallahassee, was the western capital of the Florida missions in the 17th century, and home to more than 1,500 Apalachee Indians and Spanish colonists. These Spaniards were the first European immigrants to settle in the Tallahassee area.

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY MISSION SAN LUIS

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MISSION SAN LUIS

Although the story of Mission San Luis and the Florida missions is not found in most American texts, its significance to the nation's multicultural history is becoming increasingly relevant. And, as the only reconstructed mission in our state, San Luis provides visitors of all ages with a powerful learning experience about Florida's rich colonial past and an appreciation of the contributions of Spaniards and Native Americans in the formation of our diverse national character.

Mission San Luis was designated a National Historical Landmark in 1960, and was acquired by the State of Florida through the Conservation and Recreation Lands (CARL) Trust Fund in 1983 because of its historical and archaeological significance. Today the site is managed by the Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources.

Award-winning archaeological and historical research conducted by Division

staff at Mission San Luis has provided unprecedented detail about social and institutional life at the missions. These studies have also provided remarkable insights into the physical appearance of the Mission San Luis community, including its most dominant building, the Apalachee council house. At over 140 feet in diameter, with the capacity to hold between 2,000 and 3,000 people, this structure is the largest known historic-era Indian building in the Southeast United States. As a symbol of the chief's authority, it speaks to the importance of San Luis as a village, and of the power of its chief. Its location on the central plaza of the Spaniards' western capital, directly across from the Franciscan church, reveals an unusual level of accommodation at this town site.

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The extensive research at Mission San Luis has been meticulously translated into rigorously authentic reconstructions and exciting educational programs. At Mission San Luis, the entire site is a classroom. Living history programs, tours, special events, and camps are offered throughout the year. Thematic educational camps for students (ages 7-15 years) immerse children in archaeology, Spanish language instruction, and living history. Students learn basic principles of each discipline, and work side by side with professionals. For example, children in the archaeology camp apprentice with real archaeologists in the field and in the new 8,100 square-foot archaeology laboratory at Mission San Luis.

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Recently installed bilingual exhibits in the visitor center provide many opportunities for all visitors to “touch” history in recreated archaeological digs, hands-on drawers, and artifact puzzles. Children’s eyes light up when they are able to feel pieces of the 300 years-old baptismal font, or discover the object gallery drawers full of Indian pottery, colorful beads, and even a tortoise shell.

The story of Mission San Luis is also being taken into classrooms throughout the state with the outreach program, *Extensión San Luis*. The program targets Florida fourth graders learning Florida history, but is also aimed at reaching underserved Hispanic students and their families. This bilingual outreach initiative places an emphasis on Hispanic and Native American heritage and history, as well as Spanish language skills and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) advancement. In 2004, *Extensión San Luis* went into migrant student classrooms in north Florida, and brought migrant families to Mission San Luis. The program works to provide underserved residents with a new found sense of pride in their cultural heritage and an uplifting family experience. During the fall of 2004, *Extensión San Luis* targeted Miami Dade public schools and communities.

With the leadership and support of Florida’s First Lady, Columba Bush, and a \$1 million Challenge Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, efforts are underway to secure long-term support for this nationally significant, publicly-owned site. The Mission was one of

only six projects in the country to receive a grant under the Endowment’s *We the People* initiative, which emphasizes “founding principles in the United States in their full historical and institutional contexts.” As honorary chair of the Mission San Luis Endowment Campaign, First Lady Columba Bush, and the Friends of Mission San Luis are working to encourage friends, colleagues, foundations, corporations, and caring individuals to help raise \$3 million in matching funds. The success of their efforts will help ensure that the Mission is able to continue the important work of communicating its rich cultural heritage to visitors of all ages and from all walks of life for years to come. ■



■ Governor and Mrs. Bush attend a commemorative mass at Mission San Luis.



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To Learn More

For information on *Extensión San Luis*, or to request a visit from program educators to local school districts, contact Ana Cabezas at 850.487.3711 or amcabezas@dos.state.fl.us. To find out more about the Mission San Luis Endowment, contact Diane Jefferson at djjefferson@dos.state.fl.us or call 850.487.1790. Mission San Luis is located at 2020 Mission Road in Tallahassee. The site is open Tuesday to Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and closed on Mondays, Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. Admission is free. Call 850.487.3711 or visit www.flheritage.com/archaeology/sanluis/

