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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

St. Johns County Approves Partnership with SJC Cultural Events, Inc. for the St. Augustine Amphitheatre and Ponte Vedra Concert Hall Operation and Management

ST. JOHNS COUNTY, Florida, September 20, 2023 – At the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) regular meeting on Sept. 19, the BOCC unanimously approved a public-private partnership with SJC Cultural Events, Inc. (SJCCE). Effective Oct. 1, 2023, SJCCE will oversee the operation and management of the [St. Augustine Amphitheatre](#) and [Ponte Vedra Concert Hall](#).

While the County will continue to retain the ownership or leasehold interests, including associated buildings, real estate, and further improvements, SJCCE will assume comprehensive operational duties. These responsibilities cover event management and promotion, supervising facility expenses, coordinating cultural series such as the Sing Out Loud Festival and the Fort Mose Jazz and Blues Series, and maintaining all facilities and equipment.

SJC Cultural Events, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to providing authentic cultural programming for St. Johns County and live music enthusiasts globally. Just like SJCCE's management and staff, the nonpaid Executive Board of Directors consists of dedicated St. Johns County residents and business professionals. These individuals bring their professional expertise to the table and have deep-rooted ties and a heartfelt commitment to the St. Johns County community.

"It's a landmark day for St. Johns County," SJCCE Board Chairman Dylan Rumrell said. "Collaborating with the dedicated County and Amphitheatre teams to bring this vision to life has been an incredible journey. To our loyal fans of the St. Augustine Amphitheatre and Ponte Vedra Concert Hall: brace yourselves, for the best of what this team can offer is just around the corner. In the words of the legendary Frank Sinatra, 'The best is yet to come!'"

The St. Augustine Amphitheatre's success is widely recognized. For two consecutive years, in 2022 and 2023, the industry-leading Pollstar Magazine ranked this venue as the top amphitheater in the United States based on ticket sales during the first six months of each year. In Fiscal Year 2023, to date, the Amphitheatre welcomed an impressive 262,663 guests across 75 events. Meanwhile, the Ponte Vedra Concert Hall has drawn in 34,075 attendees over 80 ticketed events. A significant upcoming renovation next spring is set to further enhance the Ponte Vedra Concert Hall's appeal by adding balcony seating, boosting its overall capacity.

"This new partnership provides the opportunity for greater mobility in signing performers, improving guest experiences like launching new restaurant options, elevated staff recruitment and retainment, as well as a higher degree of efficiency in daily operations of both facilities – all of which will positively impact tourism and our community," Interim County Administrator Joy Andrews said.

Andrews shared that the partnership calls for profits from ticket sales to be invested into planning more free shows for residents.

In April 2022, the BOCC unanimously agreed to form the Amphitheatre and Concert Hall Advisory Committee. The BOCC tasked this committee with evaluating and suggesting improvements to existing programs. By September 2022, the Advisory Committee submitted a Report and Recommendation to the Board, highlighting the profound economic impact of cultural events and its potential for significant growth in subsequent years. A conservative estimate pegged the direct economic influence for Fiscal Year 2022 at more than \$39 million.

After receiving an unsolicited proposal from SJCCE in April 2023, the County issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to invite more participants. On June 6, 2023, the BOCC unanimously decided to allow County staff to begin negotiations with SJCCE, aiming to define and finalize the terms and conditions of their partnership.

Adhering to Florida's public-private partnership statute, an independent review was conducted by outside counsel: Neville Wainio, CPAs and Bryant Miller Olive P.A. Their comprehensive evaluation of the SJCCE Business Plan, combined with a detailed analysis of the operational, financial, and organizational elements of the proposal, concluded that this public-private partnership is poised to deliver improved cost efficiency, enhanced community benefits, and a sustained commitment to delivering exceptional service to both residents and visitors.

Gabriel "Gabe" Pellicer, now CEO/President of SJC Cultural Events, Inc., has been a vital force behind the St. Johns County Cultural Events Division for the past 15 years. Born and raised in St. Augustine, Pellicer joined the division soon after the significant renovation of the St. Augustine Amphitheatre in 2007. Throughout his tenure, he has taken on multiple roles, culminating in his most recent position as General Manager. Pellicer has been instrumental in positioning the St. Augustine Amphitheatre and Ponte Vedra Concert Hall as must-visit venues, attracting world-class artists and fostering community-focused events. With his extensive background and deep connections to the St. Augustine music scene, Pellicer's leadership ensures continuity of the transition into the new public-private partnership with St. Johns County.

"Growing up in St. Augustine, I've been deeply connected to our music scene. Watching the St. Augustine Amphitheatre and Ponte Vedra Concert Hall evolve over the past 15 years has been a personal journey," Pellicer said. "Stepping into this new role, I'm grateful for the bonds formed amongst our team, County staff, and the Board of Directors. Today marks an emotionally profound and exhilarating moment for our team. Home is where the heart is; together, we're committed to elevating our venues, continually reaching for the best version of ourselves."

Additional summary highlights of the partnership:

- This is St. Johns County's inaugural public-private partnership.
- The contract is set to run through Sept. 30, 2050, with potential renewals in five-year increments upon mutual agreement.
- Annual audits will be presented to the St. Johns County Board of County Commissioners to ensure transparency.
- SJCCE will manage deferred maintenance projects, aiming for completion within the next three years.
- SJCCE will execute all capital improvement projects in coordination with the County.

- SJCCE commits to enriching flagship community events, such as the Sing Out Loud Festival and Fort Mose Jazz and Blues Series, while also exploring opportunities to introduce new cultural series to the community.
- SJCCE, Inc. will lead key operational tasks such as budgeting, asset management, and maintenance in collaboration with the County.
- St. Johns County will provide SJCCE annual funding: \$750,000 for County facilities maintenance and \$1.7 million for cultural series events. These amounts will be adjusted yearly based on the Consumer Price Index. SJCCE will also spearhead the previously approved Ponte Vedra Concert Hall project using allocated funds.

The partnership between St. Johns County and SJC Cultural Events, Inc. paves the way for the continued growth and enrichment of the community. Both entities are united in their commitment to elevate cultural experiences for residents and visitors alike.

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