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NEWS RELEASE

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Jacksonville Mayor John Delaney broke ground today on the San Marco Branch Library Renovation Project and the new Balis Community Center, which will connect to the library at 1565 Hendricks Ave. The \$1.8 million project is funded by The Better Jacksonville Plan and a private donation from the Balis Family of San Marco. The new facility is expected to re-open in Spring of 2003. The San Marco Library was built in 1950 and until now, has never been renovated. With more than 167,000 items circulated last year, it is the busiest neighborhood branch library in the system.

“When this project is complete, the San Marco community will have a top-notch library for families to enjoy,” said Mayor Delaney. “The Balis Community Center will add a new dimension to the facility, providing a wonderful place for community meetings, after-school programs and recreational classes.”

The new library will feature an expanded Children’s Area and more space for books and reading areas. The Library will also feature increased access to technology, with 28 additional computers, bringing the total number of computers up to 36. The Balis Community Center features a multi-purpose room with theater-style seating for 175, four classrooms, a small kitchen and a 20’ by 23’ patio that will overlook Southside Park. The library and the community center will share a conference room.

The renovation project will allow the San Marco Branch Library to expand from 7,540 square feet to 11,440 square feet. Coupled with the new Balis Community Center, the entire facility will have a total of nearly 19,000 square feet. The new facility will also have 57 parking spaces.

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Southside Park will also be improved. The Jacksonville City Council is currently considering a proposal to allocate \$100,000 from the Tree Mitigation Fund to plant new trees and improve landscaping around the east end of the park. During the library renovation and community center construction project, the play equipment at Southside Park will be placed in storage. Once the renovation and construction project is complete, the old play equipment, along with brand new play equipment, will be installed at the park. The City is also working on the design of a multi-purpose field, a walk path and new pavilions at Southside Park.

The San Marco Branch Library is the first of 12 library renovation projects in The Better Jacksonville Plan to get underway. The Better Jacksonville Plan also includes six new branch libraries throughout Duval County, as well as a new \$95 million Main Library downtown.

The San Marco Branch Library closed on March 23, 2002 to give library staff the opportunity to inventory the collection and pack books, equipment and other library materials to be stored during construction. Library service is being provided to San Marco residents at two new bookmobile stops. The bookmobile visits Swaim Memorial United Methodist Church, 1620 Naldo Avenue on Wednesdays from 12 p.m. to 4 p.m. To provide extra convenience for San Marco library customers, a nighttime bookmobile stop has been added for the first time in the library's history at Panera Bread, 1615 Hendricks Avenue on Wednesdays from 4:15 p.m. to 8 p.m. The nearest alternate location is the Mandarin Branch Library at 3330 Kori Road. A secondary alternate for customers is the Regency Square Branch Library at 9900 Regency Square Boulevard. Both branches are open Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.; and Sunday, 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. For bookmobile schedule changes or information on other library locations during the San Marco Branch expansion, library customers can call 630-BOOK or visit jpl.coj.net.

The Program Manager for the San Marco Branch Library and Balis Community Center is Heery International, a multi-disciplined professional services company with more than 1,000 employees worldwide. The facility was designed by Ebert Norman Brady Architects, a Jacksonville company with more than 15 years experience. The Construction Manager is Military Construction Corporation, a Jacksonville company with 17 years of experience building projects in the United States and abroad.

For more information, call Sharon Ashton at 630-7377.