



## OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

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### NEWS RELEASE November 6, 2002

City officials and community activists broke ground today on the new Equestrian Center and Recreation Complex at the Cecil Commerce Center on the Westside. The project is funded with \$29 million from The Better Jacksonville Plan, \$560,000 from previous parks' funds, and \$2.8 million from the latest parks' bond program. In addition, private fundraising efforts are expected to raise \$5 million, which will be used to construct barns and other amenities at the Equestrian Center. Construction is expected to be complete next year.

"This will be a one-of-a-kind facility for the entire city to enjoy. In addition, we expect the Equestrian Center to draw events from throughout the region and possibly from throughout the United States," said Mayor John Delaney. He was joined at today's groundbreaking ceremony by State Representative Mike Hogan, City Councilwoman Alberta Hipps and City Councilman Doyle Carter. Also taking part in the ceremony today was Northeast Florida Equestrian Society President Sandy Semanik and Vice President Mary Kress Littlepage, members of a citizens' group heading up the private fundraising efforts for the Equestrian Center.

The 4,000-seat Equestrian Center is a 123,130 square-foot indoor non-air conditioned structure with an earth floor performance ring, concessions, retail space, office space, staging area, concourses and participant support areas. The Equestrian Center will also include an outdoor covered arena with a performance ring, two lighted outdoor practice rings, two free standing barn-type buildings containing 150 stalls each, and areas for trailer and spectator parking.

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The 37,000 square-foot community center will house an Olympic-sized swimming pool, an instructional pool and a community-gathering center. The pool can be used for competition swimming as well as community classes and open swimming. The community center will have a multipurpose room that can accommodate events with a capacity of 224 people, and the ability to partition spaces for smaller gatherings as well. The softball complex will house four fields for girls' fast pitch softball, a concession area and a building for announcers, which connects to the community center by a sidewalk.

When the United States Navy departed the former Naval Air Station Cecil Field, the City acquired approximately 17,225 acres divided into two portions by Normandy Boulevard. Under a Public Benefit Conveyance (PBC) through the federal Lands-to-Parks program, 2,190 acres of the northern portion are designated for recreation use. Of the 2,190 acres, 1,358 are reserved as a natural recreational corridor to be managed by state and local agencies. With the Department of Interior's approval, this area will feature passive recreation activities including hiking and horseback trails, camping, hunting and fishing. This area is just a small portion of a larger natural wildlife preservation corridor connecting Jennings State Forest in Clay County, with Cary State Forest located north of the Cecil Commerce Center.

Through the creation of a Recreation Master Plan, the remaining 832 acres are designated as an active recreation area. This 20-year, multi-phase development project will eventually include several soccer fields, softball fields, a soccer, football and track stadium, tennis center, velodrome (a bicycling facility), in-line skate park, archery complex, playgrounds, and open play field areas.

For more information, call Sharon Ashton at (904) 630-7377 or visit [www.betterjax.com](http://www.betterjax.com).