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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 1, 2010

Adventurer Pat Croce to fly black flag from Key West to St. Augustine
Pirate museum set for Winter 2010 launch in nation's oldest city

ST. AUGUSTINE/KEY WEST, Fla. — Ruthless sea rogue Robert Searle once stormed St. Augustine aboard a stolen ship, pillaging his way through city streets turned blood red.

The Spanish's massive Castillo de San Marcos fortress sprung up to protect laden treasure fleets. And for a long time it worked. But three centuries later, the pirates are back. And Pat Croce's flying the black flag—all the way from Key West.

“St. Augustine has a reputation for its heritage and its history,” said pirate connoisseur Croce. “And pirates invaded the city more than once. It's perfect.”

Come winter 2010, Croce—madcap entrepreneur turned author turned Philadelphia 76ers former president— is expected to unleash a mysterious new breed of pirate museum just yards from the fort where pirates sailed and sank.

Six years ago, Croce gathered the rare scattered relics of swashbuckling pirates at the *Pirate Soul Museum* in Key West where Caribbean isle meets U.S. soil, and families and party pirates come to play. The St. Augustine version will capture even more curious kids seeking adventure beyond the hot and hectic summers.

“The families and the kids just love it; I want to be selfish and share it with more,” Croce said. “It teaches them history, geography and science. And it's also way cool.”

And with St. Augustine's built-in visitor base topping 4 million annually, the pirates are bound to seize a captive audience.

“Pat’s not only bringing his vision and energy, but an important chapter in the city and Florida’s history,” said Dana Ste. Claire, director of the city’s heritage tourism program. “This is *the* setting for his story of adventure.”

But don’t count Croce out of Key West just yet. The well-stocked Rum Barrel restaurant and bar is staying put and he could have some upcoming local shenanigans up his pirate sleeve.

Meanwhile, the St. Augustine spot will have more treasure and interactive entertainment, with treasure maps that’ll take visitors into the heart of the ancient city in search of real hidden bounty. Blackbeard’s talking disembodied head? It ain’t got nuthin’.

“My pirate museum will provide an emotional experience that people will take with them when they leave St. Augustine,” Croce said.

That is, if they leave alive. Argh!

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