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Melting Pot takes hold in Jacksonville: First Asian Garden plans for the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens

Jacksonville, FLA – The Jacksonville Asian American Alliance (JAAA) and the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens are collaborating on planning efforts for the one of the very few Pan-Asian themed gardens in the southeast region of the United States as well as within the state of Florida.

The timely benefit of the Pan-Asian themed garden entitled **Asian Bamboo Garden** serves as a catalyst to strengthen and cultivate the ever growing diversity of minority groups in the city of Jacksonville.

The \$2 million project is planned as the last themed forecourt garden at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens; it is scheduled to be completed by late summer 2008.

A reception for friends and sponsors is scheduled at the Zoo this September 2007 to highlight its ground breaking event and sponsorship program for the Asian Bamboo Garden.

As the global economy continues to manifest itself throughout the nation; its effect on Jacksonville's minority populous increases as transplants arrive from other regions of the U.S. and abroad. In natural response, the local cultural climate continues to innovate itself with diversity supporting projects to encourage growth through the private and corporate sectors.

Statistically the Asian American population is notably recognized as one of the fastest growing groups in the United States. According to the 2000 U.S. Census Report; 41.3% of Asian Americans in Jacksonville earn greater than \$60,000 per household income. This is greater than other minority groups in the area. Other reports include the forecasted population rate of local Asian Americans to over 33,000 by 2008. In the same report over 915,000 increase for the white population and over 289,000 for the African American population. Overall, minority based businesses fuel a significant thread of income back into the community. In the U.S., immigrants start 18% of new businesses and serve as a major employer within communities, contributing for eighty percent of new jobs created.

The Asian Bamboo Garden is planned to provide community enrichment, support a cultivated quality of life, a community resource for people of all backgrounds to commune and network as well as adding to the elements that allows for tolerance and diverse beauty.

"We are very happy to be involved with the Asian American community on this project. They have offered great insights about the garden design and have become partners in raising the dollars to build it," as mentioned by Dennis Pate, Executive Director of the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens.

"Planning and design elements include a design that is inspired by Feng Shui principals," said architect Tri Vu who is designing the bridge and pavilion for the garden. Vu, also an advisory board member of JAAA mentions, *"The Asian Bamboo Garden will embrace the cultures of the entire Asian American community in Jacksonville. We have also been in touch with the JAAA members of ethnic descents from China, Philippines, Korea, Vietnam and other countries for inspiration and community support."*

"We are delighted to extend an invitation to the entire Jacksonville community of all backgrounds to join us in this project," said Vida Vongsay, President of JAAA. Vongsay also mentions, *"The garden will become a community resource for people of all backgrounds to meet and network. We will be looking forward to offering a 'community center' within the Asian Bamboo Garden for meetings, parties and special events."*

Many traditional design features include a lush aquatic display near a koi-pond, an arched bridge nestled among trees and flowering shrubs, a dragon fish waterfall, a pavilion surrounded by foliage and also a bamboo forest with water misters for children to run through. The size of the garden is 1.25 acres.

Terra Design Studios in Pittsburgh will be designing the Bamboo Asian Garden as part of their overall master plan for a botanical garden at the Zoo. Terra's other commissions include Naples Botanical Garden; the children's garden at the Florida Botanical Garden in Tampa and Missouri Botanical Garden Signature Gardens: The Gardens at SIUE and Lewis and Clark Community College.

As mentioned by Tri Vu of TTV Architects, *"This project will give the local Asian American community a chance to help create a gift Jacksonville's residents and visitors can enjoy for generations to come."*

Websites:

Jacksonville Asian American Alliance

www.jaxaaa.org

Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens

www.jaxzoo.org

TTV Architects, Inc.

www.ttvarch.com

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