



Tribute to Timucua

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*November dinner
celebrated 450th anniversary
of the founding of La Caroline*

ON A BALMY SUMMER DAY in late June of 1564—a year prior to the founding of St. Augustine by Pedro Menendez and nearly three quarters of a century before the Mayflower embarked from the shores of England—a tranquil afternoon breeze blew off the St. Johns River (then called the River of May) as a group of French Huguenot colonists invited the Timucua Indians to a share a meal and celebrate. The French explorer Jean Ribault had navigated the narrow tributaries of the St. Johns in 1562, and at the behest of French King Charles IX, his countrymen had since sought a settlement on the river's banks. The Timucua lived in the area and throughout the region for at least 1,000 years before contact with Europeans, thriving because of an abundance of fish, oysters, and cultivated crops.

The Timucua and their new neighbors had been getting along amicably since French Huguenot Captain Rene Goulaine de Laudonniere returned to Northeast Florida earlier that year in ships loaded with hopeful settlers, livestock, tools, seeds and munitions. Though they were relatively new to the area, the Huguenots had likely grown accustomed to the recurrent afternoon showers, and may have planned accordingly, hosting the Timucua within the fortifications of their newly completed digs, La Caroline. The meal they enjoyed was reminiscent of our present day Thanksgiving feast, and Fort Caroline represents one of the earliest attempts by

Europeans to establish a colony in the New World.

450 years have passed since that first Thanksgiving. And, on a chilly Northeast Florida night in early November, forecasted afternoon rain was kept at bay and a dinner was held in order to honor the Sesquicentennial of the founding of La Caroline and the spirit of thanks and friendship of the Timucua and the Huguenots. The event was hosted by the Timucuan Trail Parks Foundation (TTPF), the official friends group of Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve. More than 150 guests turned out to enjoy native and French cuisine, French wine, and music on the grounds of the fort.



“The event was a culmination of almost two years of planning and a ton of hard work,” says Maria D. Mark, executive director of the TTPF, the official nonprofit “friends” group of the preserve. Joanelle Mulrain, lead community volunteer for the event, says the evening was very important to the mission of the TTPF. One of the goals of the dinner was to “bring about a new awareness of Jacksonville’s French genesis and French exploration in Florida,” she says.

The evening began under the canopy of moss-covered live oak trees outside the fort with a reception menu by chef Kathy Collins of Café Nola at MOCA Jacksonville, and specialty hand-crafted beers provided by Preben Olsen of Aardwolf Brewing. The flavors of duck prosciutto, sweet potato and thyme venison sausage, and oysters delivered pastoral charm, but it was the flatbreads—prepared in the on-site French oven—that offered the most rustic flavors.

During the reception guests enjoyed music, including the French National anthem as performed by park ranger Ann Lewellen on a gorgeous Besson marching baritone (more on this later) as living historians representing the Timucua and the French visited with the crowd, explaining the Timucua and French cultures of the 16th century.

Though conflict with the Spanish led to the demise of the original fort, the replica of the modest fortifications (as well as the doublets and fluffy collars of the living historians) offered guests plenty of details to help their imaginations run wild with visions of colonial adventure. “If the French had constructed [Fort Caroline] out of coquina instead of timber, the story would be much different,” laughs Betsy Lovett, who, along with Helen Lane, served as honorary co-chair of the event. In one of the evening’s many highlights, the two prominent Northeast Florida philanthropists fired the fort’s cannon to signal the start of the dinner. “At my age you don’t get too many firsts, but that was the first time I’ve shot off a cannon!” Lane relishes.

After the ladies provided the boom, attendees were led through the fort’s archway and once inside, enjoyed an array of French wines as well as a delectable menu prepared by an all-star cast of local chefs.





Not just a fun party, the evening was also a fundraiser for the TTPF whose mission is to preserve, protect and promote the Timucuan Trail State and National Parks.

“TTPF wants to shepherd the stewardship of these special places by directly supporting the National Parks through recruiting park volunteers, assisting with park projects, and raising philanthropic support,” says Timucuan Park’s chief ranger Brian Loadholtz.

In 1963, legislation put forth by the late Congressman Charles E. Bennet established Timucuan Ecological and Historical preserve as a national park. Along with maintaining vast swaths of trails, marshes, and other green space, the park is home to both the Fort Caroline Memorial and Kingsley Plantation. As the official friends group to the park (a National Parks Service designation), the TTPF is committed to

protecting the land, researching and interpreting its history, and the educating the public about its value.

A silent auction was successful in raising more than \$50,000 for TTPF. It was no surprise that the big-ticket item was the marching baritone (played earlier in the evening by ranger Lewellen). The baritone—hand-engraved with a depiction of the Timucuan Indians at the foot of explorer Laudonniere at Jean Ribault’s alter as commemorated by the Preserve’s Ribault Monument—was built by Besson, one of the oldest and most distinguished wind instrument companies in the world.

The baritone was purchased by a consortium including the Community Foundation of Northeast Florida, Helen Lane, Heiner Grossman, Peggy Bradley, J.F. & Peggy Bryan, Tom & Martha Baker, Patrick Casey Lorenz & Janice Murphy Lorenze and Bob Hays. The honorary counsel to France, Francois Cloc, and his company, Buffet

Group (who recently opened their North American headquarters in Jacksonville), donated the baritone. The instrument will henceforth be the property of the Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra. Cloc, one of the evening’s guests of honor, says Fort Caroline’s importance, while historical, is also personal. “My ancestors landed here, and it represents the beginning of a long and lasting relationship between France and the United States. It is also where I became an American citizen on December 10, 2013.”

It’s worth mentioning that Barbara Goodman, head of the Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve, also spearheaded the successful and fun event. She will soon be retiring after more than 34 years of service to the federal government. “Jacksonville is proud to have had such a remarkable leader as the Timucuan is part of our urban park system, of which is the largest in the United States,” says Mulrain.





The Menu:

1st COURSE

Bouillabaisse with saffron tomato fish broth featuring white fish, clams & mussels, served with rustic French bread

EXECUTIVE CHEF CHRIS COHEN & EXECUTIVE SOUS CHEF WESLEY NOGUEIRA, bb's

WINE: *Marquis de Goulaine Muscadet "Serve & Maine," Loire Valley, France 2013*

ENTRÉE

Canard au Vin - Red Wine-braised Duck Legs, Mushrooms, Carrots & Pearl onions

Assorted Herb-Roasted Root Vegetables served on a Bed of Millet

EXECUTIVE CHEF SAM EFRON, TAVERNA

Whole Roasted Pig prepared on-site by Sous Chef Zeke Mears, Bistro Aix

WINE: *Jean-Maurice Raffault "Les Galuches," Chinon, Loire Valley, France 2011*

DESSERT

La Tarte Aux Fruits featuring an Apple & Currant Oatmeal Crisp

EXECUTIVE CHEF CHRIS COHEN & EXECUTIVE SOUS CHEF WESLEY NOGUEIRA, bb's

