

History of the Jacksonville Equestrian Center

The Jacksonville Equestrian Center (JEC) has a very unique history. The land upon which the JEC is located was part of the US Navy Master Jet Base called Cecil Field. When the base was closed under the federal BRAC legislation in 1999, the City of Jacksonville (COJ) received the entire parcel of land at over 17,000 acres from the Navy. Mostly undeveloped forest land on the North Side, the South Side includes the airstrip that is the second longest runway in Florida and was the alternate landing site for the space shuttle program.

A group of citizens petitioned the US Department of Interior (DOI) for an allotment of the land for recreational purposes. DOI conveyed just over 2000 acres on the North Side as Public Park Land to the citizens of Jacksonville. The COJ developed a master plan for the property, named The Cecil Recreation Center, funding it through a tax payer initiative called the Better Jacksonville Plan. The Master Plan allocates 823 acres of the 2,000 as “active” recreational property, which allows the JEC to expand and other recreational facilities to be built.

The JEC, part of the master plan, is a 30 million dollar facility and is currently portioned at 80 acres. JEC will be expanded during our capital buildout. Surrounding the JEC are an Olympic-sized indoor heated competition pool and recreation center opened year round, competition softball fields, a trail head access to paved and unpaved trails for riding, hiking, cycling, fishing, bird watching and recreational activities such as cross country track, community runs and obstacle courses. These 2000 acres of trails connect to Pope Duval Park through a viaduct under Interstate I-10. Across the street from JEC is a public golf course, picnic pavilions, an auditorium, a gymnasium, a jetport and access to Jennings Forest, a 5000 acre preserve with trails, kayaking/canoe courses and additional trail heads.

Until September of 2014, the JEC was managed by a private management group. NFES, a 501c3 non-profit, bid and won the management of JEC. NFES is an all-volunteer board and oversees the management of JEC. Since its contract, NFES has undertaken a capital campaign for expansion and improvements to the facility using a public-private partnership and many generous donors, vendors and trade partners. Our expansion plans are currently underway and will be highlighted later in this proposal. NFES is a member of the Jacksonville Chamber of Commerce, Visit Jacksonville and The Westside Business Leaders.

The JEC was originally opened in 2004 and has been hosting equine and community events since. These events include USDF Regional Qualifying and Region 3 Dressage Finals; The MaClay and Southeast Medal Finals; NTRL Finals; NBHA Shamrock Showdown, NBHA Fiddlers Turkey Run, NTRL Rope for the Truck, CPE National Agility Trials, The Florida Equestrian Celebration with its famed “Dinner in the Dirt” PRCA Rodeo, Classic Company Hunter Jumper Grand Prix; a Presidential Campaign Rally; The Super Bowl NFL Owners Dinner and party; The Florida Department of Transportation-Five Districts Career Day; The League of Equine and Agricultural Centers Footing Symposium; The Mustang Makeover (first time in Florida) and many other events. We have hosted exhibitors from 48 states, Canada, Mexico and other international locations.