



## Viva Florida 500 Week Commemorated Across Florida

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Five-hundred years after Juan Ponce de León landed on the shores of Florida, the state joined together for the anniversary week of his landing. April 1-7, 2013 was officially proclaimed Viva Florida 500 Week by Governor Rick Scott and celebrated with dozens of historical and cultural events around the state.

Ponce de León is believed to have landed on the east coast of Florida during the week of Pascua Florida ("Feast of the Flowers"), Spain's Easter celebration, on or around April 2, so the anniversary of his landing saw no shortage of attention exactly 500 years after that pinnacle landing. Crowds gathered in key cities that claim his first landing place- from Ponte Vedra in the north to Melbourne Beach in the south.

Spectators in St. Augustine witnessed a reenactment of Juan Ponce de León's landing, firing of the canons from the Castillo de San Marcos and ceremonial laying of the wreath beside the Ponce de León statue. During the Juan Ponce de León Commemorative Mass, the Cathedral Basilica of St. Augustine blessed a new baptismal font which is an exact replica of the sacramental font used to baptize young Ponce. The Florida Governor and Cabinet also conducted their monthly meeting in St. Augustine at the historic Flagler College and toured around the historic city. Meanwhile, a Juan Ponce de León landing was also seen on the shores of Ponte Vedra Beach, where a new bronze Ponce de León statue and historical marker was dedicated at the Guana Tolomato Matanzas Reserve in front of cheering onlookers. And there was a reenactment on the beach at one of the possible landing sites, Brevard County's Juan Ponce de León Park.

Statewide excitement and activities grew through the rest of the Viva Florida 500 Week. The Department of State's Museum of Florida History in conjunction with the State Archives of Florida displayed some of the state's most important documents that are rarely seen by the public. These included Florida's original 1838 Constitution and the 1589 map of Sir Francis Drake's West Indian Voyage. Tour goers were also given a behind the scenes experience of the museum in the Bureau of Archaeological Research Conservation Lab. Children and families from around the Leon County area were treated to a world premiere of the *Viva Florida 500 TV Special* before it aired on local stations throughout Florida. And a Spanish ship float made by Tallahassee's "Spanish Krewe" sailed through the Springtime Tallahassee parade!

Viva Florida 500 Week was a great success, but Florida's 500 year anniversary isn't over yet. Thanks to the hard work of partners across every county, there will be even more excitement and activities to come. Check Viva Florida 500's [Calendar of Events](#) to see what's going on near you.