

# Massive door has a mission

## Hand-carved panels illustrate the history of Mission San Luis



**By Kathleen Laufenberg**  
 DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

There's nothing like a grand entrance, and now Mission San Luis has one.

A stunning 13-foot-high mahogany entrance door was fitted with eight hand-carved panels earlier this week. The project was nearly three years in the making, executive director Bonnie McEwan said.

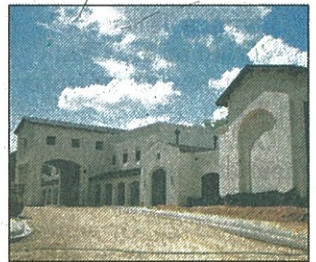
"It really gives people that sense of arrival," she said of the door.

Each panel tells a story illustrating the history of the Spanish mission and the Native Americans who lived in the area, McEwan said.

The magnificent door — McEwan is calling it "the ceremonial entrance" — will greet people at the mission's new visitors center. The \$8 million center opens Dec. 13, the first time the public will get to check out the giant door and its panels.

The door project cost \$24,000, McEwan said, and was part of Florida's art-in-state-buildings program, which mandates that one-half of 1 percent of the total appropriation for the construction of a state building be used to purchase art.

After reviewing dozens of artists' submissions, Orlando's Erick Villanueva was chosen to carve the panels. A



Democrat files

**The new visitors center at Mission San Luis will open to the public on Dec. 13.**

native of the Philippines who comes from a long line of woodcarvers, Villanueva has done artwork for Disney. He selected plantation-raised Honduran mahogany for the Tallahassee mission doors.

"I'm really impressed with all of them," McEwan said of the panels. "It's amazing how many symbols Erick managed to get in there."

The panel about religion, for instance, includes a depiction of what may be the mission's most widely known artifact, a crystal cross carved by a Native American. The small, 2-by-3-inch cross was featured on the PBS television show "History Detectives," she said.

Each panel also has a cross carved on the door's interior side.

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■ See a photo gallery of the panels as they were being created and the finished product

Special to the Democrat

The 13-foot-high door at the visitors center was fitted with the carved panels this week. Shown here are artist Erick Villanueva and San Luis Mission Executive Director Bonnie McEwan.