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NEWS RELEASE

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CELEBRATION MARKED EARLY, UNDER-BUDGET COMPLETION OF DOWNTOWN REACH OF RIVER IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT

The official public opening of the Downtown Reach of the \$140 million, 10-year project to enhance 13 miles of the San Antonio River from Hildebrand to Mission Espada was held today—ahead of schedule and four percent under budget.

“The big news today is that the Downtown Reach of the San Antonio River Improvements Project has just been completed—three and a half months ahead of schedule and four percent under budget!” stated H.B. “Trip” Ruckman III, SARA Board Chairman.

Construction on the Downtown Reach began in January 2001 and was scheduled to be completed in late January 2003. The \$12.5 million construction project, which was completed at approximately \$500,000 under budget, renovated and repaired 60-year-old walkways, the river channel, and flood retaining walls, and it enhanced the appearance of the River Walk from Houston Street to Lexington Avenue.

“The craftsmanship along this Reach sets the standard for future amenities planned for the San Antonio River Improvements Project,” stated Ruckman, “and the quality of the work on the channel and flood retaining walls continues the legacy of excellence set by River Walk creator Robert Hugmann back in the 1940’s.”

The first phase of the Downtown Reach project began in January 2001 and was completed in March 2002. That phase encompassed the River Walk area from Lexington Avenue south to Convent Street. Work on the second phase, which officially opened today, spanned from Convent Street south to Houston and began in the Spring of 2002. Major cracks in flood retaining walls and erosion to the river’s pilot channel had seriously deteriorated the flood control protection in this Reach of the River Walk.

“The flood control features in this Reach—as well as improvements to be made in the other Reaches of the San Antonio River Improvements Project—will ensure greater flood control protection for San Antonians along the River.”

In addition to the County-funded flood control repairs, the City funded the addition of access ramps for the mobility impaired along with more walkways, increased lighting, more visible and aesthetic signage, enhanced landscaping, and artwork by local artists Oscar Alvarado, Carlos Cortés, and Maxwell Studios—efforts to make the River a prime destination for both citizens and tourists and to reflect the community’s vision for the River Walk as documented in the project’s design plan.

“This project is the result of a vision—the community’s vision for the future of its River and its River Walk,” stated Lila Cockrell, co-chair of the San Antonio River Improvements Project, who noted that the community’s attention would now turn to the design phase of the Mission and Museum Reaches of the River Improvements Project.

Irby Hightower, co-chair of the San Antonio River Oversight Committee, noted that the public input process has already begun on the Mission and Museum Reaches.

“Through these public meetings, we hope that a community vision as strong as that developed for the Downtown Reach will be developed for the Museum and Missions Reaches,” stated Hightower, noting that groundbreaking for the Eagleland project, another environmental restoration River Improvements Project located from Lonestar Boulevard to Eagleland, is scheduled before the end of the year.

The construction and right-of-way budget for the two-phase Downtown Reach was \$12.7 million, with \$10.4 million in flood control improvements and \$2.3 million in amenity enhancements. Savings of approximately \$500,000 were realized. The project is jointly funded by Bexar County through the flood control tax and by the City of San Antonio. SARA serves as program manager for the San Antonio River Improvements Project and provided construction management on the Downtown Reach.

“The really wonderful thing about our River Walk is that *it* helps businesses and *businesses* help it,” stated Mayor Ed Garza, who praised the Downtown Reach as an enhanced greenspace and an economic boost to businesses along the River. Mayor Garza also thanked area residents and businesses for their patience and support throughout the project.

With the official public opening, the Downtown Reach is turned over to the City of San Antonio Parks and Recreation Department for maintenance.

For more information about the San Antonio River Improvements Projects, log onto its website at www.sanantonioriver.org.

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