

# First Coast Cultural Center Earns Autism Certification and Joins St. Johns County's Accessibility Initiative

*First Coast Cultural Center has achieved the Certified Autism Center™ designation to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for autistic guests*

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The [First Coast Cultural Center](#) has achieved the [Certified Autism Center™](#) (CAC) designation from the

International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (IBCCES). This certification recognizes organizations committed to creating welcoming, inclusive, and accommodating environments for autistic and sensory-sensitive guests and their families. Staff at the center have completed autism-specific training and certification programs, enhancing their ability to assist all visitors more effectively.

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The training we have received from IBCCES will allow us to expand that community and create a welcoming environment for everyone.”

*Donna Guzzo, President, and CEO of First Coast Cultural Center*

“It is important to be a certified center for people with autism. We welcome everyone and strive to provide a safe environment. For us it makes sense to train the staff and dedicate some areas of the Center for low sensory experience. First Coast Cultural Center’s outreach is Sound Connections® music therapy for children with disabilities in St. Johns County schools. We are very excited to have the knowledge, tools, and resources in making people connect,

engage, and experience the Cultural Center. This is YOUR Cultural Hub,” said Donna Guzzo, President, and CEO.

By completing the CAC program, the First Coast Cultural Center joins the St. Johns County initiative to achieve the [Certified Autism Destination™](#) (CAD) designation, awarded by IBCCES to awarded to communities that offer a wide range of trained and certified facilities and services in sectors such as recreation, entertainment, and lodging. The initiative currently includes



organizations such as the St. Johns County Chamber of Commerce, the St. John County Visitors & Convention Bureau, Old Town Trolley Tours® & Attractions of St. Augustine, including Old Town Trolley Tours®, Old Jail, Oldest Store Museum Experience, St. Augustine History Museum, Potter's Wax Museum, St. Augustine Sailing, and others in the process of completion.

"The training we have received from IBCCES will allow us to expand that community and create a welcoming environment for everyone," Guzzo added. "The First Coast Cultural Center strives to be inclusive so all of our guests can create and enjoy the Arts."



As part of its mission to integrate the Arts into community life through arts education, exhibitions, and outreach, the First Coast Cultural Center has implemented various measures to ensure accessibility for all guests. These include the establishment of low sensory areas, available at all times, and sensory-friendly hours before and after events for viewing exhibits in a more comfortable setting. Additionally, fidget toys and headphones are available to further enhance the experience for guests with sensory sensitivities.

"The CAC designation shows First Coast Cultural Center's efforts to create a welcoming and safe space for all their guests. We are proud to partner with them in creating such an environment with our training program and ongoing support. This is also another step closer to helping St. Johns County become a Certified Autism Destination™ which is awarded to communities that offer a multitude of accessible and accommodating options to autistic and sensory-sensitive individuals and their families," shares Myron Pincomb, IBCCES board chairman.

IBCCES has been the leader in cognitive disorder training and certification for healthcare, education, and corporate professionals around the globe for more than 20 years. IBCCES is the only global credentialing board providing travel and entertainment organizations with training and certification from subject-matter experts and autistic self-advocates, and other resources, as well as long-term support that helps them understand how to better accommodate and assist autistic or sensory-sensitive visitors and their families.

IBCCES also created AutismTravel.com, a free online resource for families that lists certified destinations and connects families to other resources and each other. Each destination listed on

the site has met the Certified Autism Center™ (CAC) requirements.

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#### About First Coast Cultural Center

First Coast Cultural Center is the place in our community to create, understand, and experience the Arts. We accomplish this through exhibitions of local, regional and national artists in a variety of media; through exciting events for the community; and through quality arts classes, lectures and workshops. Learn more at [Firstcoastculturalcenter.org](http://Firstcoastculturalcenter.org)

#### About IBCCES

Committed to providing The Global Standard For Training and Certification in The Field of Cognitive Disorders – IBCCES provides a series of certifications that empower professionals to be leaders in their field and improve the outcomes for the individuals they serve. These programs are recognized around the world as the leading benchmark for training and certification in the areas of autism and other cognitive disorders.

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