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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Houston-based Non-Profit Opt's Out of Galveston Sandcastle Event

Galveston, TX, [October 26, 2023] – After 37 years, the Houston chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) has chosen to forego its sandcastle competition in Galveston. The event has served as a fundraiser for the non-profit group.

Traditionally, the event has taken place at Galveston's East Beach drawing thousands to watch and participate. AIA earns money from the event through sponsorships and team registration fees it assesses for the nearly 50 teams that participate. In the 37-year history of the event, the park board has not charged the AIA a rental fee for the beach park.

Staging an event of this magnitude requires a significant investment on the park board's part. The Coastal Zone Management crew prepares each site for sandcastle building and extra security is needed to control traffic flow and protect the sculptures. Additional park board staff is pulled in for the weekend to handle customer service, facilities maintenance, parking and trash pick-up. When the weather and tides cooperate, the Park Board earns beach parking revenues from the event. Last year, Park Board costs totaled \$30,000.

"With inflation, there's been a 50% increase in costs on the park board side since 2020," General Manager of Parks Vince Lorefice said.

Recently, the park board approved a consolidated event fee schedule for all beach park events. The schedule defines a reasonable contribution to help offset expenses for events. The schedule is phased over several years to ensure event planners have time to adjust their budgets.

"Because of the long-standing relationship between the Park Board and the AIA, we've had regular discussions about the best way to continue hosting this event," Lorefice said. "They asked that the event to be moved to April instead of August and the park board was willing to make the change."

Despite the discussions and willingness of the Park Board to continue negotiations, the AIA board ultimately decided to suspend the event.

"We're disappointed to learn about the AIA's decision to 'sunset' this event indirectly through social media and thirdhand email," Park Board Chairman Jason Hardcastle said. "We believe the request for a significantly discounted fee to offset increased operational costs for such a large event is more than reasonable. In fact, the Park Board offered to offset the cost of the fees through a visitation incentive program, but the AIA declined. Our offer remains on the table, and perhaps the AIA will reconsider."

About the Galveston Park Board of Trustees

The Galveston Park Board of Trustees is celebrating its 60th anniversary in 2023. The organization plays an important role in the Galveston community by overseeing tourism development, beach maintenance

and the management of several beach parks. The Park Board was established in 1963 by a City of Galveston ordinance that tasked the organization with spearheading tourism and managing land for recreational purposes as part of a wider Texas environmental push that aimed to protect coastal waters and habitats.

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