

Neighborhood Post

A weekly section of
The Palm Beach Post
neighborhood-post.com

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 20, 2008

Northern Palm Beach County



YOUR NEIGHBOR

Jupiter man, family donate time to charity

PAGE 5



SPORTS

North Palm boy, Marlins fan interviews team

PAGE 25

INSIDE

Police Blotter	2
Equestrians	3
School	6
Dining Out	10
Real Estate	22

ABOUT THE PHOTO

Bill Young, from Living Color Enterprises, works on the mangrove aquarium at the Loxahatchee River Center in Jupiter, which will have its grand opening on Saturday. **Story, page 4**

CYDNEY SCOTT/Staff Photographer

IN FOCUS

Loxahatchee River Center grand opening Saturday

Museum allows visitors to travel the river to ocean.

By LADY HEREFORD
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

JUPITER — In this museum, touching is not only allowed, it's encouraged.

Visitors to the new Loxahatchee River Center will not only see examples of the river's various habitats, but they'll have a chance to experience interactive exhibits.

In one, observers will get to see firsthand how a flood plain works by unleashing a rush of water into a tank. In another, visitors will make choices to see how difficult it can be to balance water uses.

"We're just trying to get people to connect with the river," said Jocelyn O'Neill, environmental educator for the center, located at Burt Reynolds Park, 805 N. U.S. 1.

The \$1.3 million educational center's grand opening will be from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. The free event will include tours, family activities, a bounce house and refreshments.

An artist's giant replica of a cypress tree with a built-in video screen greets visitors as they arrive. The display provides an overview of the exhibits, which take the visitor on a mini-

tour of the river's habitats, starting with the cypress swamp and leading to estuaries with oyster reefs and mangroves, sea grasses, dock pilings and ending with coral reefs.

One of the first exhibits is an 1,800-gallon freshwater aquarium that was built to represent the wild and scenic part of the river, O'Neill said.

The tour also includes an educational component to show observers where their drinking water comes from. It also includes information about conservation and recycling.

The Loxahatchee River District recycles about 95 percent of its wastewater into irrigation water, O'Neill said, adding that the district treats about 11 million gallons of water a day.

Among the other exhibits is a touch tank where visitors can interact with starfish, sea cucumbers, sea urchins, hermit crabs, snails and horseshoe crabs.

Observers also will see a dock piling tank. Concrete pilings are better for marine life than pressure-treated ones, O'Neill said. "You create a kind of mini ecosystem that brings in a bunch of fish," she said.

The tour concludes with a saltwater aquarium that represents the area from the Jupiter Inlet to the offshore reef, as well as an informational room where visitors can learn more in-



CYDNEY SCOTT/Staff Photographer

A worker installs a boat at the Loxahatchee River Center, and details will be added to create an illusion of being underwater

at a dock. The grand opening will be held from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday. Visitors will see firsthand the stages of the river.

formation about how they can do their part to protect the river.

The 5,000 square-foot center, housed in the former Loxahatchee River Historical Museum building, also includes a gift shop and a multi-use room

that can be rented to groups and organizations.

The center also will house traveling exhibits in the future, officials said.

A grant from the Loxahatchee River Preservation Initiative helped pay for the center, along with a match-

ing grant from the Loxahatchee River District and contributions and grants from several other agencies, O'Neill said.

To help raise additional money, all of the exhibits are available for sponsorship, she said.

For information about the center, visit the following Web site: www.loxahatcheeriver.org.

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