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Local News

PVPLC nature center represents start of 'new era'

By Ashley Ratcliff, Peninsula News
Thursday, May 20, 2010 10:40 AM PDT



SAN PEDRO — White Point Nature Preserve, a parcel rich in history and nestled along the San Pedro coastline, for years has been a destination for outdoor discovery.

With the completion of a nature education center at the 102-acre property, Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy officials said they look forward to offering an enhanced learning experience for visitors.

The Palos Verdes Peninsula Land Conservancy on Saturday will host a grand opening celebration at White Point Nature Preserve for its nature education center. PVPLC Executive Director Andrea Vona, left, and Director of Education Programs Kristina Ellis explore the center interactive exhibits.

Formerly a Cold War-era warhead assembly building, the 900-square-foot facility is one of many warheads that the unique site has evolved throughout time, PVPLC Executive Director Andrea Vona said.

"It's been reborn ... It's an incredibly exciting moment," she added. "It's a capstone achievement for the White Point preserve and for a lot of the Land Conservancy's collaborations and [community] energies over the last nine years."

To commemorate the accomplishment, the PVPLC on Saturday, May 22 will host a grand opening celebration from 10 a.m. to noon at White Point Nature Preserve, 1600 Paseo del Mar in San Pedro.

Officials from the city of Los Angeles' Department of Recreation and Parks

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will be on hand at the event. Attendees may partake in guided hikes led by Director of Education Programs Kristina Ellis and Education Associate Meaghan Mihalic, tours of the native plant demonstration garden and a treasure hunt, and, what else, explore the new center.



In essence, the building represents a microcosm of California history, Vona said.

"The overall, global theme of the space is ... the nature preserve coming full circle," she said. "It was once an area of intact habitat and it's been altered by human use and occupation throughout time. Now, the coastal habitat is being restored for the benefits of wildlife and people."

A highlight of the center is a historically accurate mural by Robert Reid, with the National History Museum of Los Angeles, that provides a glimpse into what the landscape would have looked like during the Paleo-Indian period, Vona said.

Below that scene is a paleontology pit, where visitors can dig for artifacts, and just outside the center's doors the story of the Tongva Native Americans is detailed in the demonstration garden.

Next, the exhibit moves to the Early Californian settlers, specifically the Dominguez and Sepulveda families, who brought to the region new seeds and grasses. This period marks the infiltration of invasive plant species on the coats

of livestock and pioneers' bedrolls, Ellis said.

The displays also feature abalone harvesting in the pre-World War II era; the Japanese dry farmers at White Point; an oral history by Sumi Seki, whose farming family lived on the site; a weather station that collects real-time data; and current restoration efforts.

The parcel's military past is recounted in the field with bunkers, gun emplacements and missile assembly pads from World War II.

The building, which also offers a community meeting space, aids in the Land Conservancy's goal of becoming a regional resource, said PVPLC Development Director Bob Ford.

"That's been reflected in what we've done for the education programs. Five or six years ago, it was virtually only the schools on the Peninsula that attended our Third-grade Program," he said.

Now, about 50 percent of the schools served are Title 1, or low-income, status elementary schools, Ellis said.

"This is so valuable to them, just to be out with grass under their feet, fresh air and access to the ocean," she said. "For so many of these kids, it's the first time they've had that ... It's going to be well loved and well visited by these school kids."

Field trips will commence during the next school year. However, the

center will be open Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and by request for special events.

According to Ford, a substantial donation from the Alcoa Foundation — led by President Paula Davis and Fastening Systems President Vitaliy Rusakov — bolstered the exhibits. Sizable funding from the Major Family Foundation made possible the demonstration garden, while the Ibrahim El-Hefni Technical Training Foundation provided the seed money to complete the conceptual planning.

White Point formally was dedicated as a nature preserve in May 2000. Three years later, the land was opened to the public.

When the PVPLC began managing the preserve in February 2002, there only was 1 percent of native plant cover, Vona said. Since then — through a 25-year management agreement with the landowners, the city of L.A. — the coastal sage and cactus scrubs, and grasslands habitat have been restored.

“This [nature education center] is the crown jewel in the White Point preserve, but let’s not forget about why it’s there — and that is it’s 100 acres of absolutely gorgeous land, and we want people to get to know it better ... It’s the start of a new era,” Ford said.

For more information, call the PVP Land Conservancy at (310) 541-7613 or visit www.pvplc.org.

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