

New nature center provides window to Pajaro Valley's wetlands

Official opening slated for Sunday

Wetlands RP 4-23-09

Rex Rackley (left) gets help from Assistant Public Works and Utilities Director Bob Geyer (center) and Carl Johnson of Public Works and Utilities, in the installation of wood signs outside the new Nature Center in Ramsay Park on Wednesday afternoon.

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Register-Pajaronian



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Watsonville residents can now get an even closer look at the abundance of plant life and rare species found within the 800 acres of the region's wetlands, one of the largest remaining marsh areas along the Central Coast.

With half of the city's six-mile wetlands trail project already completed along Struve Slough and the opening of the new Wetlands of Watsonville Nature Center slated for this weekend, there are ample opportunities to learn about the local environment and how to protect it.

Watsonville community members are encouraged to help celebrate the official opening of the

new nature center Sunday in conjunction with annual "Day of the Child/Earth Day" festivities.

"The purpose of the center is really to serve as a portal into the new slough trail system," said Bob Geyer, assistant director of the Department of Public Works and Utilities for the city of Watsonville, as he and others worked to prepare exhibits in the 1,000-square-foot center located at the rear of Ramsay Park on the edge of Watsonville Slough. "We decided to put the nature center here because we wanted it to be in a real family-oriented location. Plus, it's right next to the slough."

At the heart of the nature center

See CENTER, page 8



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Bob Geyer inspects a new 3-by-5-foot 3-D relief map of the Watsonville Slough system in the nature center, which officially opens Sunday.

CENTER

From page 1

lies a 3-by-5-foot three-dimensional relief map that gives a detailed birds-eye view of Watsonville's wetlands.

There will also be stunning bird photography from 11 local and regional photographers among other slough-centered exhibits.

"Most of the displays that we have up right now are temporary, as we're waiting on more permanent displays that are being created right now by a professional museum design company," Geyer said, adding that all exhibits are bilingual. "Some of the exhibits they're working on include one on the history of Ohlone Indians, one of local birds, a water resources display and exhibits on the life in and geology of the sloughs. We hope to have those installed sometime in October."

In the future, the city will continue work on completing the slough trails south of Main Street and Harkins Slough Road, as well as begin work on restoration of the Watsonville Slough with the help of Proposition 13 monies.

"It's been extremely gratifying to see people already out enjoying the slough trails — the families walking, moms with strollers, older residents," Geyer said. "That's really what we'd hoped for with all of this project — giving people more access to the area."

The nature center also includes



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Nature photographer Patricia McQuade helps arrange an educational photo display comprised of numerous photographers' works in the Nature Center.

a "Kid's Room," complete with animal puppets, stuffed animals and other educational toys, where parents can leave their young children so that they have a few minutes to themselves to browse the museum on their own. Starting Sunday, the center will be open on weekends only and used by schools and other groups during the week.

"The whole philosophy behind this project is really to make the center and the trails a place where people feel welcome," said Patricia McQuade, a local graphic art-

ist working on exhibit design. "That way, we're hoping that people will get some sense of ownership for these wetlands and, subsequently, take better care of them."

For more information on the Wetlands of Watsonville Nature Center and the wetlands trails, contact the Department of Public Works and Utilities at 728-6133. For information on tours or restoration projects, call the Watsonville Wetlands Watch at 728-4106.