



## Eco Tourism campaign: \$1 million strong

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— CLINTON — Contributions to the proposed Mississippi River Eco Tourism Center project have passed the \$1 million mark, Jim Haring, Clinton, co-chairman of the campaign, has announced.

“We are thrilled to have reached this level,” Haring said. “We are confident that, with this news, other potential donors will finalize their commitments and we’ll soon reach our final goal of \$1.5 million.” Norlan Hinke, of DeWitt, also a co-chairman, said, “We are in the final laps of attaining a successful campaign. Local and area individuals and businesses have risen to the challenge.

“Today, when there are so many options for people to consider when investing their philanthropic dollars, we are pleased donors are responding so positively.” Haring added, “The Mississippi River is such an important resource for all of us. We need to be good stewards of it and teach children to continue that stewardship.”

School field trips currently bring more than 4,500 children annually to Rock Creek Park to take eco cruises aboard the Clinton Conservation Board’s pontoon boat, the Blue Heron. Hundreds of adults also take the publicly offered cruises on Thursday evenings throughout the summer. “Their experience will be enhanced by being able to see river inhabitants in the large aquarium planned for the eco center,” Haring said. “More than 15 species of fish live in local waters, along with a variety of mussels, reptiles and amphibians. The variety of land-dwelling species and birds make the river habitat unique.”

Rock Creek Marina and Campground is located at the confluence of the Mississippi and Wapsipinicon rivers. The 8,400-square-foot tourism center is planned to showcase the history of the area and the life it supports. In addition to a 5,000- to 10,000-gallon aquarium, exhibit of taxidermy and live animals, a camp store and café, the center will have meeting spaces and a banquet facility.

With the first \$1 million of pledges in hand, the Clinton County Conservation Foundation has authorized the architectural firm, Gardner Architecture of Strawberry Point, to proceed with working drawings.

The firm, which has done several facilities, including the Nature Center in Maquoketa, “has a lot of good ideas in terms of energy efficiency and using recycled materials,” said Walt Wickham, conservation director.

Here are some questions which have been asked, and their answers:

- Why is the center going to be built in a floodplain?

The Clinton County Conservation Board, which manages the Rock Creek facility, is very familiar with the effects of flooding. Over the years it has learned much about how to live with flooding, officials said.

The new center is designed so it will be elevated above the 500-year flood level.

- What about tax dollars? I don't want my taxes increased.

The project is being funded with private donations plus \$300,000 in economic growth money from the county board of supervisors.

Rock Creek's revenues from park and marina fees and camp store revenues make the park almost self-sufficient.

However, some tax dollars are used because conservation employees are county employees, funded by the board of supervisors.

- How will the center be heated and cooled?

It will be heated and cooled by a geo-thermal system. Energy efficient lighting will also be used.

- Who will own the center?

Clinton County will own it and it will be under the management of the conservation board.

The conservation board has a 50-year lease from the Army Corps of Engineers for the land. There are still 38 years to run on the current lease. The park itself is designated as public access to the Upper Mississippi Wildlife Refuge.