

Office of the County Executive
1320 Pewaukee Road, Room 320
Waukesha, WI 53188

Phone: (262) 548-7902
Fax: (262) 896-8510

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: Wednesday, May 18, 2005
Contact: Meghan Walsh – Executive Assistant, (262) 548-7902

Retzer Grand Opening Shoots for the Stars

Waukesha, WIS. – Join Waukesha County, the Waukesha School District, the Friends of Retzer Nature Center and the Friends of the Charles Z. Horwitz Planetarium at Retzer Nature Center’s public grand opening on Saturday, May 21 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.

County Executive Dan Finley said, “This special event marks a unique partnership between Waukesha County and the Waukesha School District that provides exceptional opportunities for our youth, their families and community participants. I sincerely hope that all our residents come out for the grand opening festivities to see how the Retzer Nature Center has grown.”

The event includes a formal program and ribbon cutting ceremony at 9 a.m. to dedicate the learning center expansion and the relocation of Waukesha School District’s Charles Z. Horwitz Planetarium. Immediately after the program, visitors will enjoy these special activities until 12 p.m.:

- *The Unseen World*: An exhibit featuring a touch and discover area, native fish, teaching animals and a walk-through prairie underground.
- Planetarium shows
- Face painting
- Scavenger hunts
- Guided tours
- Hand-fed baby buffalo

Special guest and former NASA Astronaut Mark C. Lee (Col., USAF, Ret.), a veteran of four space flights, which included an Atlantis, Endeavor and two Discovery launches, will talk about space travel, answer questions and sign autographs.

-more-

Retzer Grand Opening Shoots for the Star, continued...

By focusing on environmental education, natural land management, community restoration and wildlife habitat improvement, the 4,622 sq. ft. learning center expansion will provide more flexible space for year-round activities like public workshops and student programming. It also includes an identifiable entrance with a user-friendly visitors center and a dynamic, permanent exhibit area.

The Waukesha County Parks System Division began developing Retzer Nature Center in 1974, after Florence Horn Retzer bequeathed her property to Waukesha County for park purposes a year earlier. Significant land acquisitions between 1980-84 expanded the site to 335 acres. Today, its beautifully restored prairies, colorful butterfly garden and oak savannah greet over 20,000 visitors annually.

“This expansion project is a shining example of how public partners can work together to effectively provide our community with complementary existing services,” said Finley. “I commend the Waukesha School District for its foresight and commitment to the project, which will provide the public with greater opportunities to engage in natural science education through cross-programming.”

The 3,620 sq. ft. planetarium will enhance the Waukesha School District’s programming and will provide more opportunities for larger groups of students, families and community participants to learn about the earth and space in a 3-dimensional environment that effectively demonstrates challenging space science concepts conducive to a variety of learning styles.

Waukesha School District Superintendent David Schmidt said, “In working with Waukesha County on this cooperative venture, we will continue to help students learn science and math concepts beyond the classroom. The many opportunities available through this facility will engage children and their families in to new worlds of learning. It is important to note, however, that such efforts would not be possible without partnerships. School districts need partners such as the County and others to add value to educational experiences for children.”

The planetarium originally opened its doors in 1978 at the Waukesha School District’s administrative building on Maple St. in Waukesha. Over the past 26 years, the facility has held approximately 20,000 programs and has served more than 400,000 visitors.

“The expansion and relocation project truly demonstrates why organizations should seek out partnerships that mutually benefit the parties involved and the community at large,” said Waukesha School District Board Chairperson Bill Baumgart. “The learning center and planetarium will provide operational benefits, as well as enhanced opportunities for students and the public.”

The Friends of Retzer Nature Center, a private, non-profit support group dedicated to the facility’s natural resource-based efforts, raised \$280,000 for the learning center expansion. In addition to this generous gift, the county and the school district funded project costs.

-more-

Retzer Grand Opening Shoots for the Star, continued...

The Friends of Retzer Nature Center Board President said, “Our organization strongly believes in the natural-resource based mission at the facility, which is why we committed to raising money to support the project. As a small non-profit organization, the Friends of Retzer Nature Center is appreciative of the overwhelming response from donors, so that the center will have a significant and lasting community impact.”

The Retzer Nature Center is located at S14 W28167 Madison Street in the Town of Genesee. For more information about the event, please contact Meghan Walsh in the County Executive’s Office at (262) 548-7902.

###