

PRESS RELEASE



City of Bristol Tennessee

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New Steele Creek Nature Center expansion officially open

Local nature lovers, city officials, and representatives from the nonprofit Friends of Steele Creek Nature Center and Park gathered this afternoon to cut the ribbon on the newly constructed Nature Center expansion, officially opening it to the public. BurWil Construction Co. of Bristol began work on the roughly \$1 million, 5,100-square-foot addition in May of 2016. This additional square footage more than doubles the usable space of the original structure, built in 1996. The new structure was designed by Mark Freeman Architecture, PLLC.

While the ribbon cutting serves as a major milestone in the history of the Nature Center, rather than symbolizing the end of a project, it instead represents the further continuation of efforts to expand the educational programming offered at the park. Visitors will be able to interact with a number of the overall exhibits that are planned for the new space, including an interactive birder's forest, a crawl-through cave experience, and a 1,100-gallon aquatic life display, with additional exhibits opening soon. The building's design is accented by a number of large windows which provide a sweeping panorama of the Steele Creek Park lake, which essentially becomes a living part of the exhibits inside the center. "Our exhibit and program attendance has been steadily growing for the last 10 years or more," said Nature Center Manager and Chief Naturalist Jeremy Stout. "The expanded Nature Center will allow us to accommodate larger groups and offer a more diverse array of educational programming," he added. Displays for the Nature Center have been designed in partnership with internationally recognized exhibit designer and Bristol native Ed Hackley.

Construction costs for the project were financed by the City of Bristol, Tennessee via the issue of general obligation bonds, to be repaid with the assistance of the \$2 vehicle entry fee at the park, however funds for the exhibits themselves were raised by the Friends of Steele Creek Nature Center and Park. The total project fundraising goal is approximately \$450,000, of which approximately two thirds has been donated or pledged. The funding secured thus far not only provides for the installation of several major exhibits, but also for the outfitting of the new DeFriece-Wilson Classroom, which will serve as the home for many of the classes and programs offered by the Nature Center. The organization will continue to raise funds for the installation of future exhibits. "We have donations and pledges that will allow us to begin work on some

additional exhibits in the coming months, and we continue to reach out to the community to help us fund the rest of this exciting project,” noted board member Robin Feierabend. With the doors to the expansion now open, plans are also being formulated to begin renovations to the original building as well.

The newly expanded Nature Center is only the most recent example of a number of successful partnerships between the city and dedicated community groups. “The Ida Stone Jones Community Tennis Center, the Steele Creek Park Splash Pad, and now the Nature Center expansion demonstrate the power that these types of public-private partnerships have to improve the quality of life not only for the citizens of Bristol, but also for the visitors from around the region that come to enjoy these attractions,” said Terry Napier, Director of Parks and Recreation.

The Nature Center is open daily year-round, and admission is free with park admission. The opening of the Nature Center also coincides with the 20th Annual Wildlife Weekend, which kicks off with a photography show and reception at 6:30 PM on Friday, October 13th, and continues through Saturday afternoon. For a full schedule of activities, as well as additional information about the Steele Creek Park Nature Center, please call 423-989-5616 or visit www.bristoltn.org.