

## Park education pavilion celebrated Saturday

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson  
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CLEAR LAKE STATE PARK — Sharing the wonders of nature with today's children — who increasingly are in front of a video screen rather than climbing trees and playing in the open air — is a principal goal behind the Clear Lake State Park's new education pavilion, which was celebrated Saturday.

The groundbreaking for the education pavilion was part of "A Wild Affair in Your Park." Rain earlier on Saturday had organizers of the outdoor event a little concerned, but the weather cooperated to offer a sunny and not-too-cool, picture-perfect fall afternoon.

Construction of the education pavilion, which will be located near the park visitor center, is expected to begin next month, said Madelene Lyon, president of the Clear Lake State Park Interpretive Association, which has worked for the last four years to make the project a reality.

Saturday's celebration was especially poignant in the aftermath of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's proposal earlier this year to close 48 state parks — among them, Clear Lake State Park and Anderson Marsh State Historic Park — in order to address the state's budget crisis. That proposal was withdrawn in Schwarzenegger's May budget revise.

Federal, state and local officials who took part in Saturday's event credited Lyon for her hard work and tenacity in getting the project off the ground — including raising the \$183,000 to build the pavilion.

After the idea originally was proposed four years ago, Congressman Mike Thompson — who took part in the groundbreaking — went to State Parks Director Ruth Coleman, one of his former staffers, and asked her for help.

At that time, Coleman set aside \$60,000 for the project, an amount she managed to protect through a budget crunch and the threat to shut the park made earlier this year.

"This is a very important milestone for this park," Coleman said Saturday.

Coleman said the pavilion's construction is coming at an important time. Pointing to the project's theme of "No Child Left Inside," Coleman said it will help bring children back to the outdoors.

She said children today spend 30 minutes a week in unstructured play outside, versus 14 hours in front of a screen. "It's like they are under house arrest."

That's leading to young people coming to parks with a very different mindset than those shared by previous generations, said Coleman.

Thompson, Coleman and Lyon were joined in the official groundbreaking by Supervisor Rob Brown; Wilda Shock of the Keeling-Barnes Family Foundation; Myron Holdenried, whose grandparents, Fred and Nellie Dorn, donated the property that became the state park 60 years ago, and who himself has donated to the pavilion effort; Steve Brookes, representing the Priest Family Foundation, another major project donor; the park's Supervising Ranger Ryen Goering; and Mark Covella, Bay Area manager of the California Conservation Corps, which will build the pavilion.

In addition to the \$60,000 provided by the State Parks Department, the \$183,000 raised to build the pavilion came from a variety of other sources, including a \$6,000 grant from the California State Park Foundation, \$10,000 from the Keeling-Barnes Family Foundation, and funds from the Priest Family Foundation and other local, private contributions.

Still needed, however, is money to outfit the pavilion with scientific and other equipment, said Lyon. In addition to featuring the groundbreaking, A Wild Affair — which Lyon said was a one-time event — also was a fundraiser to raise those additional funds. Fifteen wineries and nine restaurants were featured, sheltered under tents set up within a green outline on the ground that signified the education pavilion's footprint. Visitors also could look at exhibits from the visitor center, included a large stuffed mountain lion. Live music added to the festive fall atmosphere.

As soon as the state signs the contract, the pavilion's construction can begin, said Lyon.

Covella said the California Conservation Corps is aiming to start construction in the middle of November.

A Conservation Corps team of about 12 people from Ukiah, led by two crew supervisors with general contractor experience, will build the facility over a span of about four months, he said.

Some of the work is likely to be held up by rain during the winter season, but if all goes well the building could be completed by spring, said Covella. Lyon added she would love to see the building completed in time for the Heron Festival and Wildflower Breakfast next April.

During his remarks, Thompson said Lyon had been tenacious in her desire to see the pavilion built. "When she knew that was the right thing to do, she didn't let go," said Thompson.

But, he added, he didn't need much convincing. "She had me at 'hello,'" said Thompson.

Thompson, who reminisced about the importance of the outdoors in his childhood, said he looked forward to coming back when the pavilion was open and children were there to enjoy it.

Brown, who had traveled to Sacramento earlier this year to argue against closing the park, also credited Lyon for her efforts. He added that it's fortunate to be in a community "where we can put something like this together."

Former state senator and current Assembly candidate Wes Chesbro said a longterm strategy is needed to help preserve the state's parks.

"State parks have been underfunded for years and years and years," which he said he plans to address if he's elected in November.

A Wild Affair was six months in the making, said Lyon. "We're very, very pleased about how it turned out."  
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