

Visitor center will bring green amenities to shores of Mark Twain Lake

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MONROE COUNTY, Mo. -- A new \$4.5 million visitor center will open at Mark Twain Lake on Saturday, bringing green and modern amenities to the shores of the Northeast Missouri recreation haven.

The M.W. Boudreaux Memorial Visitor Center will open to the public Saturday morning with a ribbon-cutting at the new facility and a rededication of the nearby Northeast Missouri Vietnam Memorial.

Mary Ann Heitmeyer of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which administers Mark Twain Lake, called the new visitor center near the Clarence Cannon Dam "a showcase for the region."

Funded by federal stimulus dollars, the center features a variety of construction considerations that add up to a gold Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) designation -- no small feat for the contractor who worked on the building, Maryland-based John J. Kirlin Special Projects.

"There's a lot of different things that go into making a building meet LEED qualifications," Heitmeyer said. In the new visitor center's case, those include environmentally friendly lighting and windows, geothermal heat, low-flow water faucets and motion-detecting lighting.

The visitor center also includes a community room with audiovisual capabilities, a covered outdoor classroom with amphitheater seating and a fire ring, and a great room that will house the former visitor center's Batty Mural. An interactive copper chandelier will honor partners and volunteers in the project, and an outdoor viewing deck and drive-around vista will afford views of the lake and dam that Heitmeyer repeatedly described as "spectacular."

New informational exhibits on the dam and the area also will fill the visitor center, including interactive displays about hydroelectricity and some Northeast Missouri fossils like a mammoth tooth unearthed by sportsmen in 1985.

The new visitor center replaces the original M.W. Boudreaux Center, which was the centerpiece of the lake's recreation area of the same name. It closed permanently at the end of the 2004 recreation season after a wood preservative treatment used in its construction contributed to severe structural decline.

Despite the untimely demise of the former visitor center, Heitmeyer said officials hoped to "stay on the positive" with its replacement.

Also to be dedicated Saturday morning is the relocated and refinished Northeast Missouri Vietnam Memorial, a monument to 45 Northeast Missouri soldiers killed during the Vietnam War, which will sit at the new visitor center's southeast corner.

Saturday's 10 a.m. ceremony will be followed by live music from RaluGerri and activities including an animal track station and a GPS station. Bobber the Water Safety Dog, the Corps of Engineers' mascot for children, also will be on hand.

The visitor center will be open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily after Saturday's dedication, except for major winter holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas.

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