

# Biophilia center offers free tours at grand opening

## Center opening for visitors Friday through Sunday

### Special to The Sun

There is good news for everyone who has been waiting for the opportunity to visit the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center. Through an innovative, public-private partnership between the Walton County Tourist Development Council and M.C. Davis, the E.O. Wilson Biophilia

Center will provide a fun, new activity for visitors and the community that did not exist before.

Nestled on Nokuse Plantation, one of the most biodiverse areas in the continental U.S., the hands-on learning center will be open to the public during select days and times throughout the year, beginning June 3.

"We see this as a good opportunity to further develop ecotourism offerings for visitors to Walton County," said Commissioner Scott Brannon, chairman of the Walton County Tourist Development Council. "This opportunity is in line with goals of the TDC to enhance the visitor experience and offer more beyond the beach activities as well as the county's long-term goal to support and encourage conservation and preservation."

The tourism industry and community is invited

to the grand opening celebration from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. June 3. Activities will take place throughout the day, including tours of the center, interpretive programs by Turtle Bob and more. A barbecue lunch plate (chicken or pork) will be offered for \$5 for those who wish to take their lunch hour and experience the center. The grand opening will be the last opportunity to experience the biophilia center free of charge.

"We encourage everyone in the tourism industry to come out and see this great new asset for visitors to the region," said Dawn Moliterno, executive director of the TDC. "This one-of-a-kind facility offers a fun, entertaining and educational experience for families to reconnect with each other as well as the world around us."

The educational facility, which has earned LEED

certification because of its environmentally design, traditionally has only served students, teachers and professional audiences. The center is nestled in the Longleaf Pine ecosystem, which is considered one of the most biodiverse areas in the continental U.S. As such, this special location promotes and expands eco-tourism opportunities to visitors from national and international markets. Therefore, through a financial commitment from the TDC that will offset costs of increasing operating times, the facility is open to the public during select days and times throughout the year.

From June 1 through Aug. 31, the center will be open to the public from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Fridays; 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturdays; and 1 to 5 p.m. Sundays.

In addition, during the shoulder season, Sept. 1 through May 31, the cen-

ter will be open to the public from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturdays.

Admission will be \$5 for adults, \$2 for children ages 6-12, and free for children 5 and under.

It is through the visionary work and contributions of Walton County conservationist and resident M.C. Davis that this 49,000-acre tract of conservation land named Nokuse Plantation may be experienced by visitors, enhancing their appreciation for unique biodiversity found in Walton County.

Each weekend, the center will focus on a different theme, featuring specialized programs such as birds of prey, remnants of a forest and gopher tortoises, among others. Trails will be closed to the public, with the exception of special schedule tours, which will be featured on the E.O. Wilson Biophilia Center website, [www.eowilsoncenter.org](http://www.eowilsoncenter.org).