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## **Renovated Nature Center now open at Hunting Island State Park** *The facility will welcome an estimated one million visitors annually*

**Beaufort, S.C.** - On Tuesday, September 26, local and state leaders cut the ribbon on the renovated Nature Center at Hunting Island State Park. The project was spearheaded by the Friends of Hunting Island (FOHI) and supported through their [membership](#) dollars, donations, and local Accommodations Taxes.

Hunting Island State Park is one of the most popular parks in South Carolina, home to five miles of beaches, thousands of acres of marsh and maritime forest, a saltwater lagoon, and a variety of land and marine wildlife. The Nature Center is located at the entrance to the park's fishing pier on the southern tip of the island and it offers fascinating educational opportunities for all ages. The renovated center features local Gullah artwork, animal exhibits housing alligators, turtles, and snakes, and a variety of artifacts and displays interpreting the area's history, natural environment, and wildlife. Interpretative rangers will be available at the Nature Center for education and hands-on experiences that will exceed the expectations of visitors, especially children.

The project was born out of a meeting with previous park manager Brandon Goff, FOHI President, Linda Miller, and Randal Brown, FOHI Construction Director in September 2022. From hand-sketched plans to six months of planning and hard work, their shared vision became a reality.

FOHI provided \$75,000 for the project and Beaufort City Council supported the project through a \$30,000 state Accommodations Tax grant. Work began in March 2023 under the direction of Brown. Park staff and volunteers completed the majority of the labor to bring the project to life. Work from local artists, Luana Graves Sellars, Founder of Lowcountry Gullah, photographer Wade Spees, and fine artist Sonja Griffin Evans adorn the walls, grounding the center with an inspiring sense of place. Many of the facility's educational components focus on the unique qualities of the ever-changing barrier island.

Speakers at the ribbon-cutting event included Hunting Island State Park Manager, Zabo McCants; Ramsey Grove Park Manager, Brandon Goff; South Carolina State Parks Director, Paul McCormack; FOHI President, Linda Miller; and Representative Shannon Erickson. Also in attendance were partners from [Lowcountry Gullah](#), [Visit Beaufort](#), [Beaufort Area Hospitality Association](#), [Eat, Stay, Play Beaufort](#), [Business Southern Style](#) and students from [Hobbit Hill Preschool and Learning Center](#).

## QUOTES:

- “When a community decides what they want to do with a space, and has all the support from the top to the bottom, middle, and sides - everywhere - this is what you get. And it doesn’t get any better than what’s right here. This place is honoring our past, it is embracing our present, and it is planning and educating for the future. Our environment is key to who we are as Lowcountry citizens.” - Representative Shannon S. Erickson, District 124 - Beaufort County
- “The renovated Nature Center is a tremendous asset to the park, serving as the island’s anchor point on its southernmost tip and situated at the gateway to the popular and picturesque fishing pier. South Carolina State Parks take pride in the educational opportunities we offer our visitors from the beauty of nature’s classroom about history, the environment, and culture. Sites like this offer learning opportunities that open doors, open hearts, and open minds. We are so grateful to FOHI for their generous support that made this project possible.” - Duane Parrish, Director of the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism
- “It was an honor for Friends of Hunting Island to fund this 2023 keystone project and bring it forward as a learning and interpretive exhibit environment for the many visitors and educational programs that will come through this space. It was a welcome coincidence that it coincided with our 30th year as a non-profit organization, whose mission is to enhance the State Park and help to preserve this precious barrier island. We were grateful to work with everyone at Hunting Island State Park and the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism to bring this vision to reality.” - Linda Miller, President, Friends of Hunting Island
- “After moving from Oconee State Park to Hunting Island in late spring, I was honored to help bring this project to the finish line. The time, generosity, passion, and commitment that are poured into Hunting Island from so many people - from our staff, our volunteers, and our incredible Friends Group - are what makes this place so special. Our Friends Group truly is a friend to this park. Countless visitors will enjoy the Nature Center and will be inspired by what they learn here, and that is a priceless gift.” Zabo McCants, Hunting Island State Park Manager

Learn more about Hunting Island State Park and plan your visit at [southcarolinaparks.com](https://southcarolinaparks.com).

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### **About FOHI**

*Friends of Hunting Island was organized in 1993 and dedicated to helping the park enhance the unique natural wonders and educational opportunities that exist on the island. As a non-profit, 501(c)(3), independent volunteer organization, FOHI’s mission is to preserve, protect, and enhance the natural and cultural resources of Hunting Island by educating the public and promoting a variety of programs. With a current membership of over 1,300 volunteers, FOHI continues to grow, matching the park’s increasing need for help to initiate and maintain various projects and functions that otherwise might be scaled back due to state fiscal restraints. Learn more at [friendsofhuntingisland.org](https://friendsofhuntingisland.org).*