

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Pine Islanders to Benefit from New Heritage Tourism Facility

Pineland, Florida, - December 2003 - The opening of the new visitors facility at Randell Research Center is now a closer reality. With each day excitement mounts for those who have worked hard to generate the nearly \$1M needed to make needed site improvements. The new activity pavilion, classroom, restrooms, gift-shop and interpretive trail system will mean that visitors have a more complete and valuable heritage and educational experience.

That is important for the businesses and citizens of Pine Island. Heritage and cultural visitors spend a lot of money in the State of Florida. They eat out, stay in hotels and make other retail purchases that help fuel the economy. But the long term benefits that the new visitors center will help generate go beyond the obvious. A recent study titled The Economic Impacts of Historic Preservation in Florida, states "Heritage tourism can offset the costs of maintaining historic sites, help stimulate preservation efforts and perpetuate a sense of place that lends communities their unique character and identity."

Nancy Koucky of Koucky Studio at McGowan's Farm is excited about the new visitor center. "Randell Research Center brings high value visitors to our island. These are the kind of tourists who spend money on art purchases and restaurant meals. The people who come into my gallery after visiting Randell seem to appreciate what we are doing to try to preserve this island and its environment." Rob Wells, of Tarpon Lodge and Restaurant in Pineland concurs. "I can only see positive benefits for island businesses with the opening of Randell's visitor center. The archeological experience will provide our guests with a good activity, especially in bad weather when they can't boat and often go off the island to spend their money at the malls."

The center will provide valuable educational opportunities for the children of the island as well. School children from throughout the southwest Florida community are already regular visitors and the new classroom will provide a comfortable learning environment for our school and public programs. The visual presentations of life among the ancient Calusa Indians will offer a clear picture of how these people thrived on our island for over 1,500 years. It will help visitors, school children and islanders better understand the value of our eco-systems and the need to preserve them for future generations.

The Randell Research Center volunteer Board of Directors is initiating a drive to raise the last \$170,000 needed to complete the project. According to Rick Joyce, Chairman of the Randell Research Center Advisory Board, it is critical that we raise the

last 17% of funds needed for the classroom so that construction costs are minimized and the classroom can be completed on schedule.

The new center facilities are scheduled to open in June of 2004. Anyone interested in becoming involved in learning more about the ancient Calusa, or in participating in a true archeological dig experience can contact the Center at 239-283-2080.

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