

DEL MAR TIMES

Grand Avenue bridge takes on new life

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By Laura Petersen

More than 100 residents gathered Sunday for the opening of the Grand Avenue Bridge, which has been transformed into a viewing platform overlooking the restored San Dieguito Lagoon and wetlands.

The bridge, which was built during World War II as access to the U.S. Navy airfield, was originally slated for demolition as part of the wetlands restoration project.

That is until Jacqueline Winterer, the president of the Friends of the San Dieguito River Valley, suggested the bridge be preserved as a viewing platform.

"It was the first time an idea was instantly taken to heart by everyone (at the Joint Powers Authority)," said Dick Bobertz, executive director of the San Dieguito River Park.

The end of the bridge has been removed to prevent access into the lagoon and the platform has been equipped with benches and interpretive signs for the public to enjoy.

While work on the \$90 million wetland restoration project will continue through 2009, the event celebrated the efforts of many to turn dream into reality.

Representatives spoke from Southern California Edison and San Diego Gas & Electric, which are funding the project as environmental mitigation, as did people from the Del Mar Lagoon Committee, Del Mar Mayor Crystal Crawford and San Diego County Supervisor Pam Slater-Price.

They all attributed the environmental success to the many passionate volunteers and collaborators who never gave up fighting for the lagoon.

Dawn Rawls, a lagoon committee member, said if it hadn't been for the continued tenacity of community activists, the lagoon would have been filled in for parking, a hotel, restaurants and shopping, which was attempted twice by two different groups.

"If you're ever a little discouraged, a little tired, thinking maybe this is the year to put down the baton," she said, "remember the hotel, the restaurants, the parking and keep at it."



The Grand Avenue Bridge has been transformed into a viewing platform overlooking the restored San Dieguito Lagoon and wetlands with benches and educational signs. A ribbon-cutting ceremony was held on Sunday.

Photo by: Laura Petersen



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