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NEW INTERACTIVE NATURE CENTER OPENS AT HONEYMOON ISLAND STATE PARK

DUNEDIN, FL—The new Rotary Centennial Nature Center at Honeymoon Island State Park will open to the public on May 10th with the grand opening ceremony beginning at 10 AM. The Nature Center will offer a variety of public ecology exhibits and educational nature tours. The Nature Center will educate visitors about Honeymoon and Caladesi Islands and the Gulf barrier islands' environment and ecology.

The Rotary Centennial Nature Center took four years of planning and construction and cost over \$850,000. It was largely funded by the Rotary Club of Dunedin, the Rotary Club of Dunedin North, Friends of the Island Parks and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. Other major contributors include the Pinellas-Anclote Basin Board and Southwest Florida Water Management District, other local Rotary Clubs, and the Audubon Society. A major individual contributor who has been anonymous to date will be announced at the Grand Opening. Over 85 different organizations and individuals contributed to the new Nature Center.

Honeymoon Island is one of the few nearly undeveloped Gulf of Mexico barrier islands in Florida. Honeymoon Island State Park was created in 1982 after local residents revolted against a proposed high rise, high density condo development. Over a period of years, the State of Florida purchased the islands and created what is now one of the most visited state parks in Florida. More than one million visitors each year from all over the world enjoy the natural beaches, trails and wildlife. Honeymoon Island was formed in 1921 by a hurricane that split it from what is now Caladesi Island. Years of careful preservation have sustained Honeymoon Island as a haven for a wide variety of wildlife, including several threatened and endangered species.

Originally given its name as a vacation spot for WWII era newlyweds, Honeymoon Island now attracts nature enthusiasts and vacationers alike with its variety of eco tours and scenic coastal setting. From Osprey nesting sites to seaside Gopher Tortoises, Honeymoon Island's unique and diverse wildlife can be seen in every corner of its natural habitat. Visitors can witness one of the Gulf Coast's largest varieties of animal life in a carefully preserved, natural environment. Honeymoon Island also showcases a wide variety of Florida's unique flora. Visitors will discover over 208 species of plants, ranging from dense mangrove swamps to beautiful wildflowers. The goal of the Rotary Centennial Nature Center is to expose visitors to this natural beauty while educating them on the concept of environmental ethics.

Tours and educational programs offered by the Nature Center will take visitors around the island and allow them to witness firsthand different kinds of plant and animal species, natural communities and weather patterns.

The Rotary Centennial Nature Center has a number of exhibits and interactive displays in order to better acquaint guests with barrier islands and their natural communities. The exhibits will give visitors a better understanding of Honeymoon's ecosystem and the importance of preserving the island's beautiful, natural habitat. One of the main exhibits at the Nature Center will be a 17ft. tall replica tree and osprey nest. The osprey is a prominent bird species with over two dozen active nests located on Honeymoon Island. Nature Center exhibits will also cover topics such as the preservation and many natural communities of barrier islands, the preservation of St. Joseph Sound, and the importance of environmental ethics. In addition, exhibits will deal with many environmental and wildlife topics including Island seasons, seasonal fires, seasonal colors, seasonal migrations, bird nesting and resting areas, turtle nesting, trees, pollen and flowers and fishing.

The Nature Center and Honeymoon Island State Park serve as a gateway to Caladesi Island, which was designated in 2006 by Dr. Stephen P. Leatherman as the #2 Best Beach in America. Visitors can access Caladesi Island through the Honeymoon Ferry or with personal watercraft.

Honeymoon Island State Park is open daily from 8 am to sunset. The Nature Center is located near the entrance to Honeymoon Island State Park at the end of the Dunedin Causeway at the west end of SR 586. Daily admission is \$5 per car. Group rates are available.

For more information, call (727) 738-2903 or visit
www.HoneymoonNatureCenter.org.

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