

BNC completes funding for construction

By David Nordby
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BRILLION – Funding is complete, and now the Brillion Nature Center will begin its second phase of its renovation project with construction on the new marsh boardwalk and platform.

“We have so much to be thankful for out at Brillion Nature Center,” Louie Lecker, naturalist at the center, said.

Lecker says that when the center acknowledged in 2019 that the original boardwalk and platform overlooking the Brillion marsh were no longer safe for public use, they quickly started researching and planning for a new design that would be more functional for programs the center hosts and for the public’s use, regardless of their mobility.

“We decided to create a stationary platform that would be just above the



The former platform at the Brillion Nature Center has been taken down. Construction on the new platform and marsh boardwalk is set to be complete in mid-September. (Submitted photo)

water’s surface so students could use dip nets to explore life in a wetland. We had no idea that our \$204,000 fundraising campaign would be challenged by a world-wide health crisis. Nearly two years later, we are ecstatic to announce that the fundraising is

complete and the construction has begun,” Lecker said.

The project started in 2019 with a site evaluation to determine how far down through the marsh muck the supports would have to go before making it to a stable surface we could

anchor into.

“Once we knew what we were dealing with, the search was underway for a company that would be willing to both work on a project of this size and work in the water,” Lecker said.

The center found Solutions 101 of Hortonville. The group typically works on much larger projects, but still met with the BNC.

“Part of the reason we selected their company was their dedication to preserving and protecting the habitat around the project area,” Lecker said.

The \$40,000 phase one of the project was completed in May of 2020. Staff of Solutions 101 created a design for our new structure and removed the old platform from the marsh.

“They did such an incredible job. In just over three hours, three guys took out every piece of wood. I couldn’t believe it when I walked back

down the trail. It didn’t look like the old platform had ever existed and there wasn’t so much as a broken branch or tire track to show that the workers had been there,” Lecker said.

Following that, fundraising began in earnest.

“We still needed to raise more than \$130,000 during a time when businesses were reducing their staff and services and, in some cases, closing their doors. Even many of the foundations that we have counted on in the past reduced the amount of funding available for projects such as ours in order to redirect their funds toward providing for basic needs and PPE,” Lecker said.

The mandate from the state that ordered the Brillion Nature Center building closed to the public and canceled all on-site programming actually turned out to be a blessing in a way, Lecker said.

It gave her an abundance of time to search for and apply for grants from foundations that they had never received assistance from in the past. Amounts received were generally \$10,000 or less, but a few came through in amounts equal to or greater than \$20,000.



The Brillion football team volunteered to work at the Brillion Nature Center and put down the very first pieces of the new marsh boardwalk. The boardwalk and platform are set to be complete in mid-September. A ribbon-cutting ceremony is set for Sept. 25. (Submitted photos)

WDNR contributed the largest amount through two separate grants of \$20,000 each. The Robert and Patricia Endries Family Foundation Ltd. gave an initial gift of \$10,000 with a pledge to give \$15,000 once the rest of the money had been secured. Ariens Foundation Ltd. gave another \$20,000.

Gifts of \$15 all the way up to \$7,500 came in from individuals, businesses, civic organizations, and small foundations. A little more than a year later, the center was still work-

ing on raising the final \$3,800 with no idea where it was going to come from.

“While we certainly weren’t giving up, we were literally out of ideas as to who else we could ask. Then we received a very exciting phone call from a representative of the R.D. and Linda Peters Foundation,” Lecker said.

The foundation had already sent a check for \$10,000 but had some extra money to spend before the end of their fiscal year. They asked how



much was still needed for the project and agreed to send a check to cover it.

With the funds secured, the center gave Solutions 101 the green light to begin phase two – the construction of the new boardwalk and platform.

“I was overjoyed to see a truck pull into the parking lot carrying boardwalk timbers on Friday, August 20, and workers beginning site preparation on Monday, August 23,” Lecker said.

The construction is slated to be finished by mid-September.

Brillion Nature Center is planning a ribbon cutting event for all donors to the project on Saturday, Sept. 25 and an open house to welcome the public to visit and see the new addition from 12-3 p.m. They will sell food, hold 50/50 and gun raffles, and provide tours.

“We hope many people will find their way out to celebrate with us,” Lecker said.

