

Major Grant from the Dolores Barr Weaver Legacy Fund Enables Construction to Begin on Accessible Glass-Bottom Boat

Boat is due in service by the end of 2020

TALLAHASSEE, FL, UNITED STATES, June 16, 2020 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Florida State Parks Foundation announced today that thanks to a \$90,000 grant from the Dolores Barr Weaver Legacy Fund, construction will begin on the first wheelchair accessible glass-bottom boat at Silver Springs State Park.



Soon no one will get left behind on the dock just because they can't walk."

Paula Russo,

"Thanks to the generosity of the Dolores Barr Weaver Legacy Fund, the Foundation has signed a contract allowing construction to begin on Silver Spring's first ever wheelchair accessible glass-bottom boat", said Foundation

CEO Julia Gill Woodward. It is hoped the boat will be in service before the end of this year.

The Dolores Barr Weaver Legacy Fund at The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida was created by Dolores Barr Weaver in 2015 as the natural evolution of the Dolores Barr Weaver Fund, which has awarded more than \$86 million in grants since she created it in 2012.

Glass bottom boat tours have been operating at Silver Springs since at least the 1920s. The current fleet, built in the 1960s and 1970s, is not wheelchair accessible and it wasn't feasible to retrofit the vessels, so the Foundation commissioned a new boat design.

The Florida Park Service took over the Silver Springs attraction in 2013. It was very run down and the expense of repairing and revitalizing infrastructure combined with coping with hurricane damage done in 2018 (the roof of a just built educational pavilion was seriously damaged) prevents the Park Service from undertaking the expense of a new accessible boat on its own.

"These boats are a beautiful unique design but people using mobility devices such as wheelchairs and scooters are excluded from the tours because the passenger must be able to step in and out of the boat. The only solution is to build a brand-new boat which is a worthy but costly undertaking," said Julia Gill Woodward, Foundation CEO.

"Thanks to the tremendous generosity of our funding partners, we can now begin construction,"

added Paula Russo, the Foundation's project's coordinator. "Soon no one will get left behind on the dock just because they can't walk," she added.

"We are delighted to be able to support this much needed and very worthwhile project," said a spokesperson for the Dolores Barr Weaver Legacy Fund.

Contributions for the vessel have also come from the Felburn Foundation, the Friends of Silver Springs State Park, and the Cape Leisure Corporation.

The Foundation, founded in 1993 as Friends of Florida State Parks and renamed in 2018, is a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation whose mission is to support and help sustain the Florida Park Service, its 175 award-winning parks and trails, local Friends groups and more than 20,000 park volunteers.

It does this through programs that preserve and protect state parks, educate visitors about the value of state parks, encourage community engagement and active use of state parks, and advocacy.

The volunteer Board of Directors represent private and public sectors as well as local and statewide interests.

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