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Ribbon Cutting Celebrates Completion of Gulf Coast Ecocenter in Gulf Shores, AL

GULF SHORES, AL — The City of Gulf Shores and the Gulf Coast Center for Ecotourism & Sustainability (GCCES) will celebrate the grand opening of the Gulf Coast Ecocenter with a ribbon cutting ceremony on Friday, April 25 at 10:30 a.m. The new campus—located on a 12-acre site adjacent to preserved wetland—will serve as a regional hub for experiential environmental education, sustainable tourism, and community connection to nature.

The Ecocenter was designed by ArchitectureWorks, LLP in collaboration with WATERSHED LLC, leading a multidisciplinary team through an extensive and inclusive design process that reflected the GCCES mission: *to inspire, empower, and educate people of all ages to be stewards of the environment and their communities.*

The new education and sustainability campus, located adjacent to Gulf State Park, was made possible through full funding from the RESTORE Act and constructed by The Green-Simmons Company. Sited among a pine savanna and existing clearings, the architecture responds to its surroundings through biophilic design, durable materials, and an open-air campus model. Structures are designed to frame views, invite the breeze, and support active programming, including nature-based camps, STEM field studies, bike programs, organic gardening, and ropes courses. The Center is pursuing LEED Gold and FORTIFIED Commercial Silver certifications for its performance in resilience and sustainability.

“This project is an example of what happens when architecture serves a broader environmental and educational mission,” said Roger Mainor, project architect and a partner at ArchitectureWorks. “From day one, the client’s vision shaped the design team’s approach—this is a place for hands-on learning, ecological awareness, and joyful connection with the outdoors.”

“The buildings and campus were designed in close collaboration with both educational and maintenance staff, so that they serve as a living laboratory for sustainable living and ecological restoration,” said Rebecca Dunn Bryant, founder and principal at WATERSHED. “We used historical climate responsive elements like deep porches, dog trots, and thermal chimneys so that visitors don’t have to retreat to the



air-conditioned interiors to be comfortable. It was important to owners and operators that the campus invite visitors to explore and appreciate the unique ecology of the gulf coast.”

With over 17,000 square feet of educational and support space, each building on campus is designed to serve as a hub for specific programming. The Mobility Hub houses bicycles for guided excursions along the adjacent state park trails, while the Making Hub includes a dedicated maker space classroom for hands-on learning and creative exploration. The Gathering Hub anchors the center of the campus, serving as both landmark and great hall for the campus.

The Gulf Coast Ecocenter will support a robust array of outdoor learning programs, including the acclaimed “Ambassadors of the Environment” curriculum developed by the Ocean Futures Society, and serves as a vital link between Gulf Shores City Schools, Gulf State Park, and the surrounding coastal community.

Notable attendees at the ceremony will include Mayor Robert Craft of Gulf Shores and Christopher Blankenship, Commissioner of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

Founded in 1995, ArchitectureWorks is an award-winning architecture design and planning firm based in Birmingham, Alabama. Five partners currently lead the firm – Jay Pigford, Cindy Coyle, and Bruce Lanier, Jessica Bennet, and Roger Mainor. ArchitectureWorks collaborates to create places of enduring quality. We value community, service, and making the world a better place to live, work, and play. Our mission is to make inspired places, and to simply make better.

WATERSHED is an award winning ecological architecture and planning firm based in Fairhope, Alabama. Led by founding principal Rebecca Dunn Bryant, the firm provides architectural design services rooted in the particular climate and culture of the Gulf Coast. The name “WATERSHED” derives from the firm’s mission to seek out create transformative projects that both demonstrate a more sustainable way to live and inspire a greater connection to the natural world.

For more information, visit:

Gulf Coast Center for Ecotourism & Sustainability – www.gulfcenter.org

ArchitectureWorks – www.architectureworks.com

WATERSHED – www.watershed.pro